It's not the stories you tell, but how they are told.

Who is the greatest mischief maker of all time? Is it the King of Stories, Anansi? Or Eshu, the Nigerian trickster god? Perhaps Thor's infamous brother, Loki? Or cunning Reynard the Fox? Discover these legendary tricksters and judge for yourself through the lens of The Storyteller as he regales his faithful canine companion...and you!

Jim Henson's The Storyteller: Tricksters showcases four clever tales of mischief makers and the lessons they teach us. Each one is inspired by folklore from around the world and told in the spirit of Jim Henson's beloved television series by some of today's most exciting voices, including *New York Times* bestselling author **Jordan Ifueko** (*Raybearer*) and artist **Erin Kubo** (*The Christmas Creature*), Nebula and Hugo Award–winning author **Amal El-Mohtar** (*This is How You Lose the Time War*) with illustrations by **Isa Hanssen**, graphic novelist **Robin Kaplan** (*The City on The Other Side*) and artist **A.L. Kaplan** (*Full-Spectrum Therapy*), and esteemed comic book writer **Jonathan Rivera** (*Carve Carson has a Cybernetic Eye*) and illustrator **Jade Zhang**.

"A perfect, five-star read."
-EGCP

"There's nothing like sharing in shared myths, legends, and folktales, and this series truly does it the best."
-But Why Tho?

ARCHAIA

Jim Henson

The Jim Henson Company

Jim Henson's The Storyteller Tricksters
Hanssen • Kaplan • Rivera • Zhang
ARCHAIA

Jim Henson's™

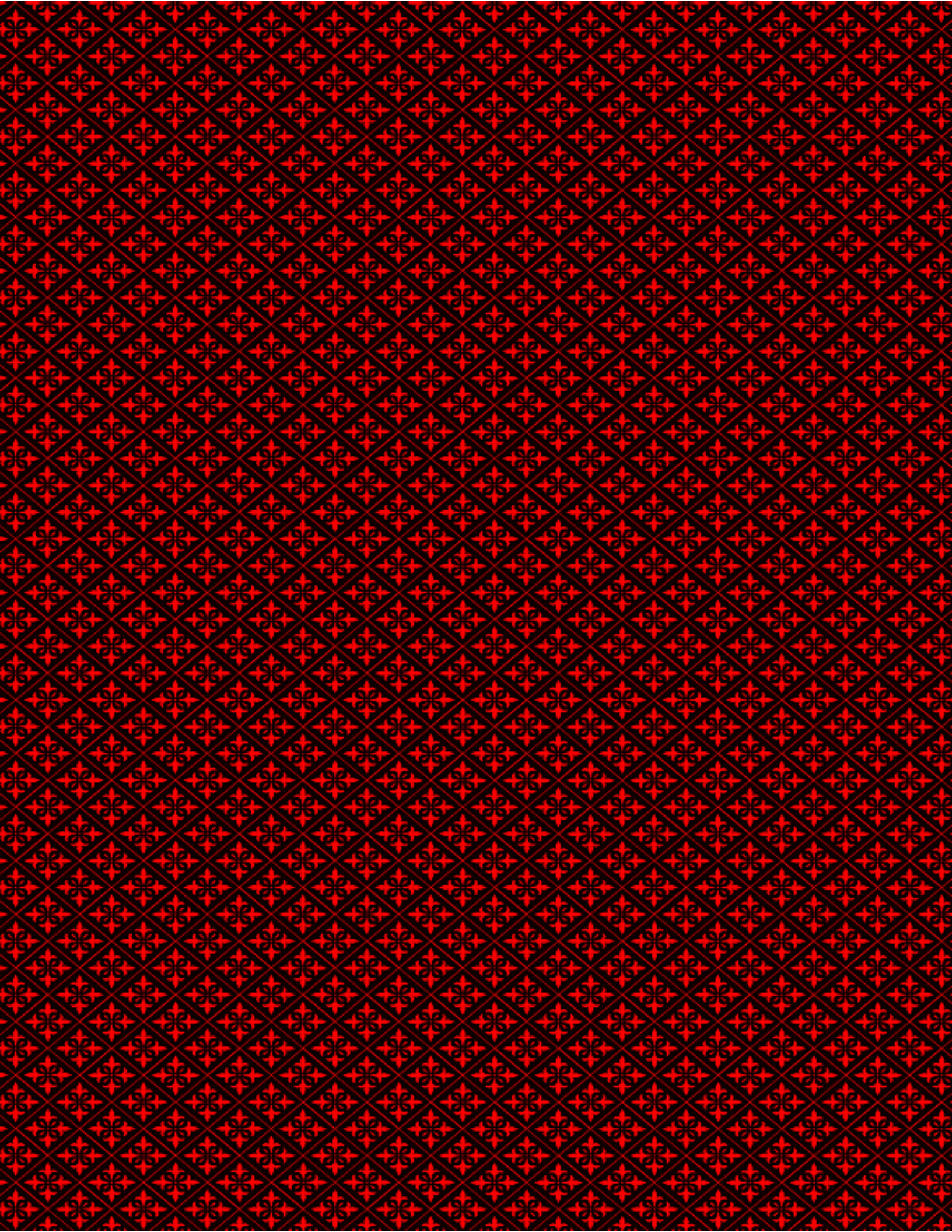
THE STORYTELLER™

Tricksters

Jim Henson's The Storyteller Tricksters

Ifueko • Kubo • El-Mohtar

ARCHAIA



Jim Henson's™

THE STORYTELLER™

Tricksters

THE SPINNER OF STORIES

Story by
Jonathan Rivera

Art by
Jade Zhang

A HEART THAT BEATS FOREVER

Story by
Jordan Ifueko

Art by
Erin Kubo

A TALE OF TWO MARKETS

Story by
Amal El-Mohtar

Art by
Isa Hanssen

LOKI THE MATCHMAKER

Story by
Robin Kaplan

Art by
A.L. Kaplan

Letters by
Jim Campbell

Published by
ARCHAIA™

Cover Art by
Peach Momoko

Cover Inset by
Sonny Liew

Spot Illustration by
Sas Milledge

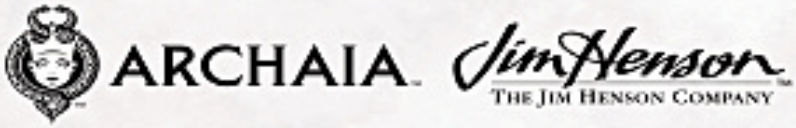
Series Designer
Michelle Ankley

Collection Designer
Marie Krupina

Assistant Editor
Allyson Gronowitz

Editor
Siena Hahn

Special Thanks to Brian Henson, Lisa Henson, Jim Formanek, Nicole Goldman, Carla DellaVedova, Karen Falk, Blanca Lista, Shannon Rubles, the entire Jim Henson Company team, Wendy Froud, and Brian Froud.



ROSS RICHIE CEO & Founder
JOY HUFFMAN CFO
MATT GAGNON Editor-in-Chief
FILIP SABLIK President, Publishing & Marketing
STEPHEN CHRISTY President, Development
LANCE KREITER Vice President, Licensing & Merchandising
BRYCE CARLSON Vice President, Editorial & Creative Strategy
KATE HENNING Director, Operations
ELYSE STRANDBERG Manager, Finance
SIERRA HAHN Executive Editor
DAFNA PLEBAN Senior Editor
SHANNON WATTERS Senior Editor
ERIC HARBURN Senior Editor
ELIZABETH BREI Editor
SOPHIE PHILIPS-ROBERTS Associate Editor
JONATHAN MANNING Associate Editor
GAVIN GRONENTHAL Assistant Editor
GWEN WALLER Assistant Editor
ALLYSON GRONOWITZ Assistant Editor
RAMIRO PORTNOY Assistant Editor
KENZIE RZONCA Assistant Editor
REY NETSCHKE Editorial Assistant

MICHELLE ANKLEY Manager, Production Design
MARIE KRUPINA Production Designer
GRACE PARK Production Designer
CHELSEA ROBERTS Production Designer
MADISON GOYETTE Production Designer
CRYSTAL WHITE Production Designer
SAMANTHA KNAPP Production Design Assistant
ESTHER KIM Marketing Lead
BREANNA SARPY Marketing Coordinator, Digital
GRICIA MARTINEZ Marketing Assistant
AMANDA LAWSON Marketing Assistant, Digital
JOSÉ MEZA Consumer Sales Lead
ASHLEY TROUB Consumer Sales Coordinator
MORGAN PERRY Retail Sales Lead
HARLEY SALBACKA Sales Coordinator
MEGAN CHRISTOPHER Operations Coordinator
RODRIGO HERNANDEZ Operations Coordinator
ZIPPORAH SMITH Operations Coordinator
JASON LEE Senior Accountant
SABRINA LESIN Accounting Assistant
LAUREN ALEXANDER Administrative Assistant

JIM HENSON'S THE STORYTELLER: TRICKSTERS, November 2021. Published by Archaia, a division of Boom Entertainment, Inc. ™ & © 2021 The Jim Henson Company. JIM HENSON's mark & logo, THE STORYTELLER mark & logo, and all related characters and elements are trademarks of The Jim Henson Company. Originally published in single magazine form as THE STORYTELLER: TRICKSTERS No. 1-4. ™ & © 2021 The Jim Henson Company. All rights reserved. Archaia™ and the Archaia logo are trademarks of Boom Entertainment, Inc., registered in various countries and categories. All characters, events, and institutions depicted herein are fictional. Any similarity between any of the names, characters, persons, events, and/or institutions in this publication to actual names, characters, and persons, whether living or dead, events, and/or institutions is unintended and purely coincidental.

BOOM! Studios, 5670 Wilshire Boulevard, Suite 400, Los Angeles, CA 90036-5679. Printed in China. First Printing.

ISBN: 978-1-68415-742-6, eISBN: 978-1-64668-320-8

TALE ONE VARIANT COVER

DANI PENDERGAST

the SPINNER of STORIES

He is known as *Kwaku Anansi*. He is also known as *Ananse*, *Bru Nansi*, *Kompa Nanzi*, and even Aunt Nancy, depending on where you are when you hear his tales.

Where do you begin with a character whose stories have been told around the world for centuries, who still manages to show up in modern popular culture? Which of his children do you include? Will it work if we combine two stories? Does this story beat make for an exciting page-turn? How do you start this thing? How do you end it?!

I was stuck.

"A story, a story; let it come, let it go."

I first stumbled upon these words while reading Gail E. Haley's award-winning children's book, *A Story, A Story*, which recounts the tale of how Anansi became the keeper of all stories. The phrase is part of an Ashanti tradition of beginning each story by saying, "We do not really mean that what we are about to say is true. A story, a story; let it come, let it go."

Reading those words led me to seek out various live performances of Anansi's stories, and that is when I fully understood what that phrase meant. What I was reading as straightforward stories truly came to life as each performer added their own twist to the material. The stories themselves were merely frameworks, and they varied greatly with each retelling. It reminded me that stories are more than just a delivery system for plot-twists, cliffhangers, and shocking revelations. They are also here to make us feel, to lower our defenses, so that we may share our experiences and help one another grow from them.

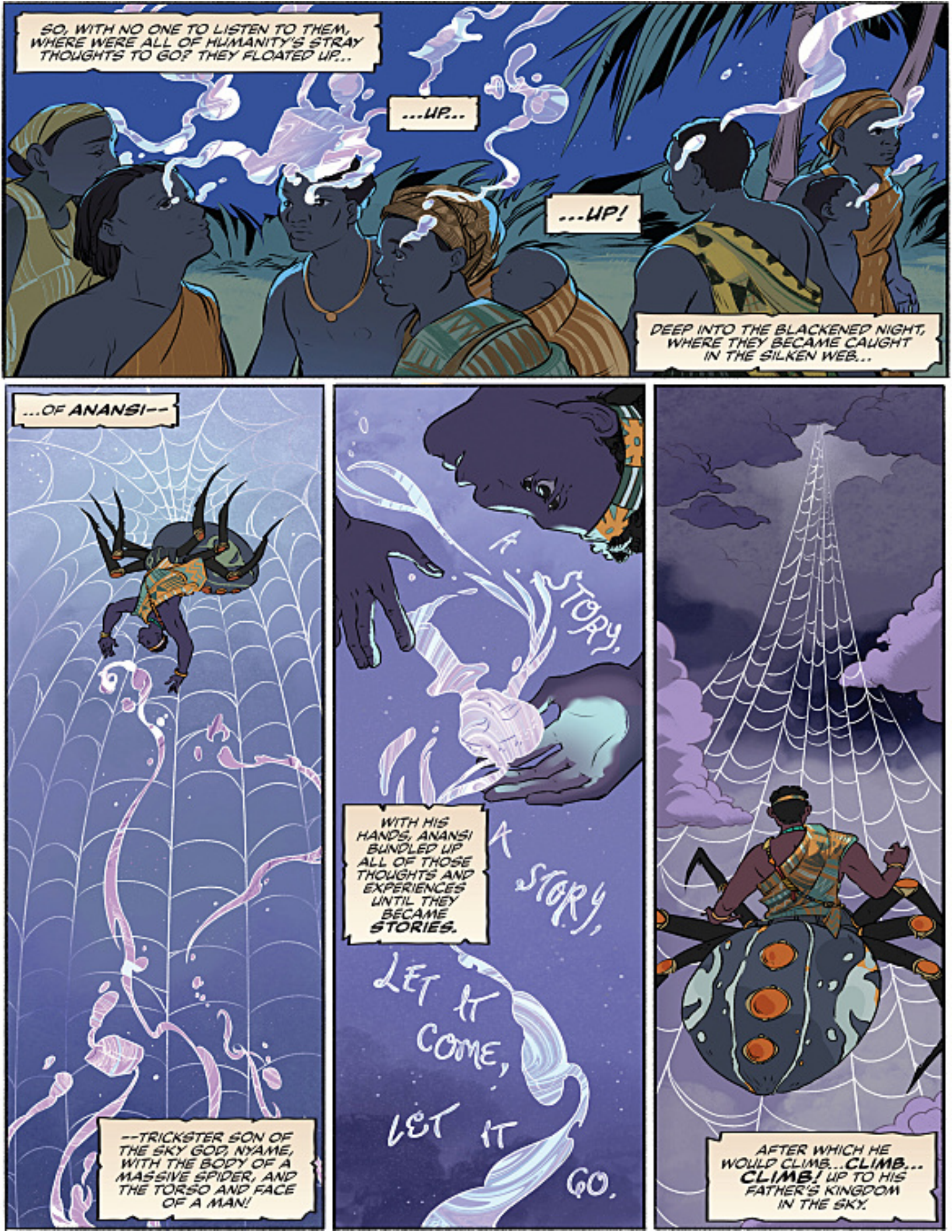
The story you are about to read is a combination of three Anansi tales: "How Anansi Got the Sky God's Stories," "Anansi and the Pot of Wisdom," and "Anansi and his Six Sons." I loved that by combining the first two stories, I could have Anansi play both the clever hero and the fool. It is also common to find Anansi aided by at least one or more of his family members, including many different children. In our story, Anansi's son Ntikuma shares some of the super-heroic abilities of his other siblings. You will also find that some words are repeated multiple times. This is a method used by the Ashanti people to emphasize the intensity of an action, a storytelling device that I found to be very cool and effective when read out loud.

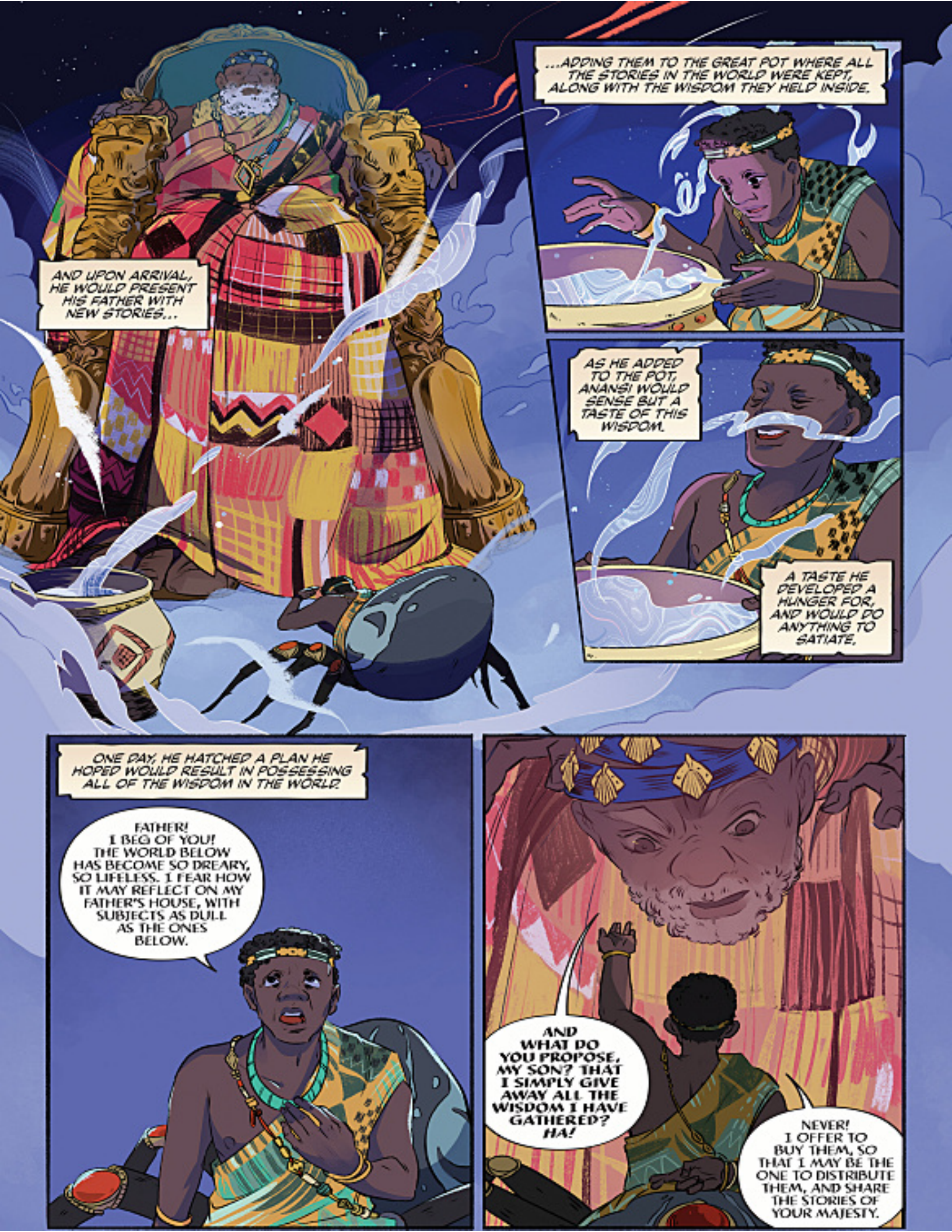
I will leave you with another phrase, one that traditionally ends an Anansi story, because I think it sums up the spirit of storytelling itself: "This is my story that I have related. If it be sweet, or if it be not sweet, take some elsewhere, and let some come back to me."

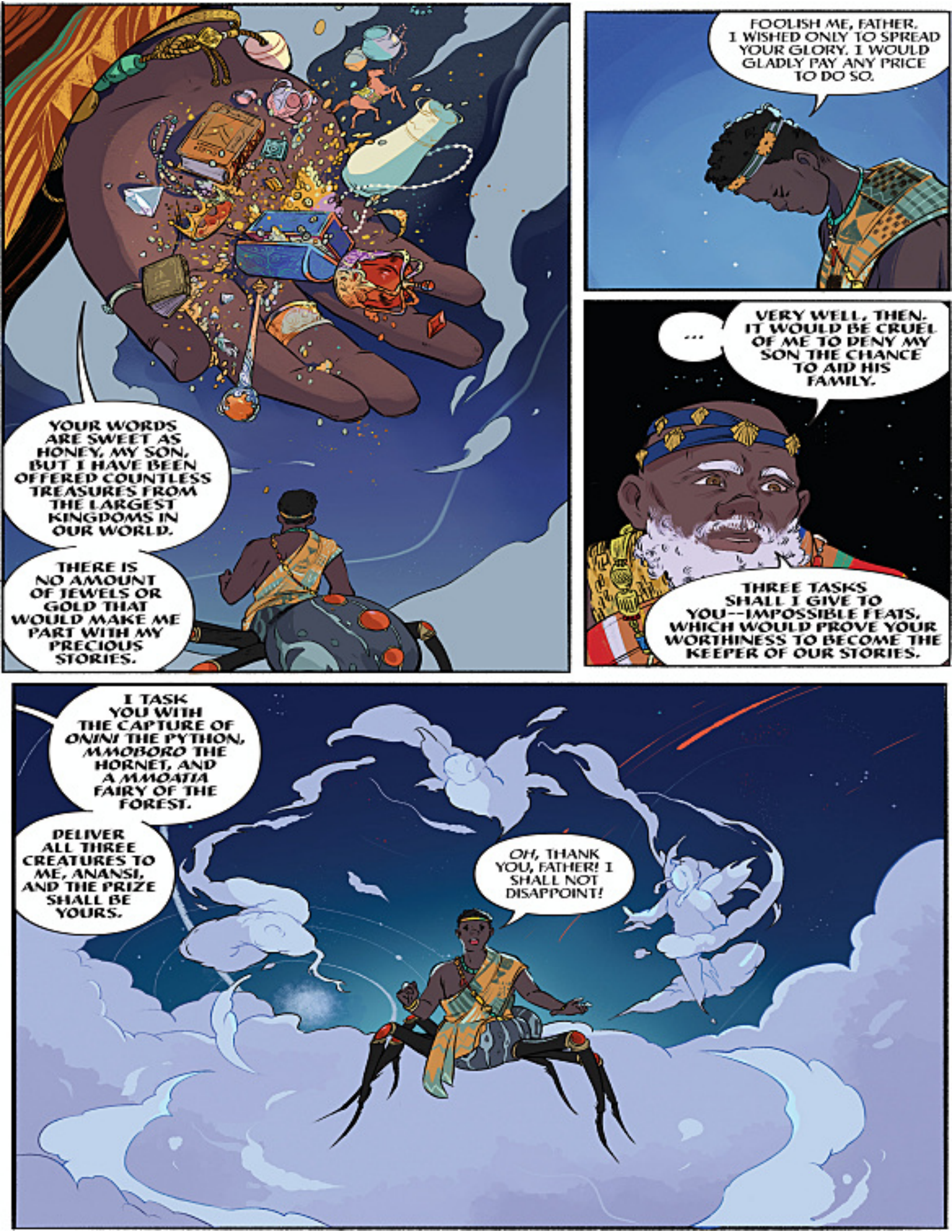
—Jonathan Rivera

WOOF WOOF!
WOOF!
FEAR NOT, OLD BOY! I'M HERE!
WHERE'S THE TROUBLE?!
WOOF!
THERE! THERE!
WOOF WOOF!
A SPIDER!
FOR SHAME! THIS IS NO INTRUDER, MY FRIEND, BUT A WELCOMED GUEST.
YUCK! WHY WOULD ANYONE WANT ONE OF THOSE IN THEIR HOME?
FOR MANY, SPIDERS PROVIDE THE SERVICE OF CATCHING PESTS, BUT FOR A STORYTELLER SUCH AS MYSELF...WE OWE THEM OUR VERY EXISTENCE.

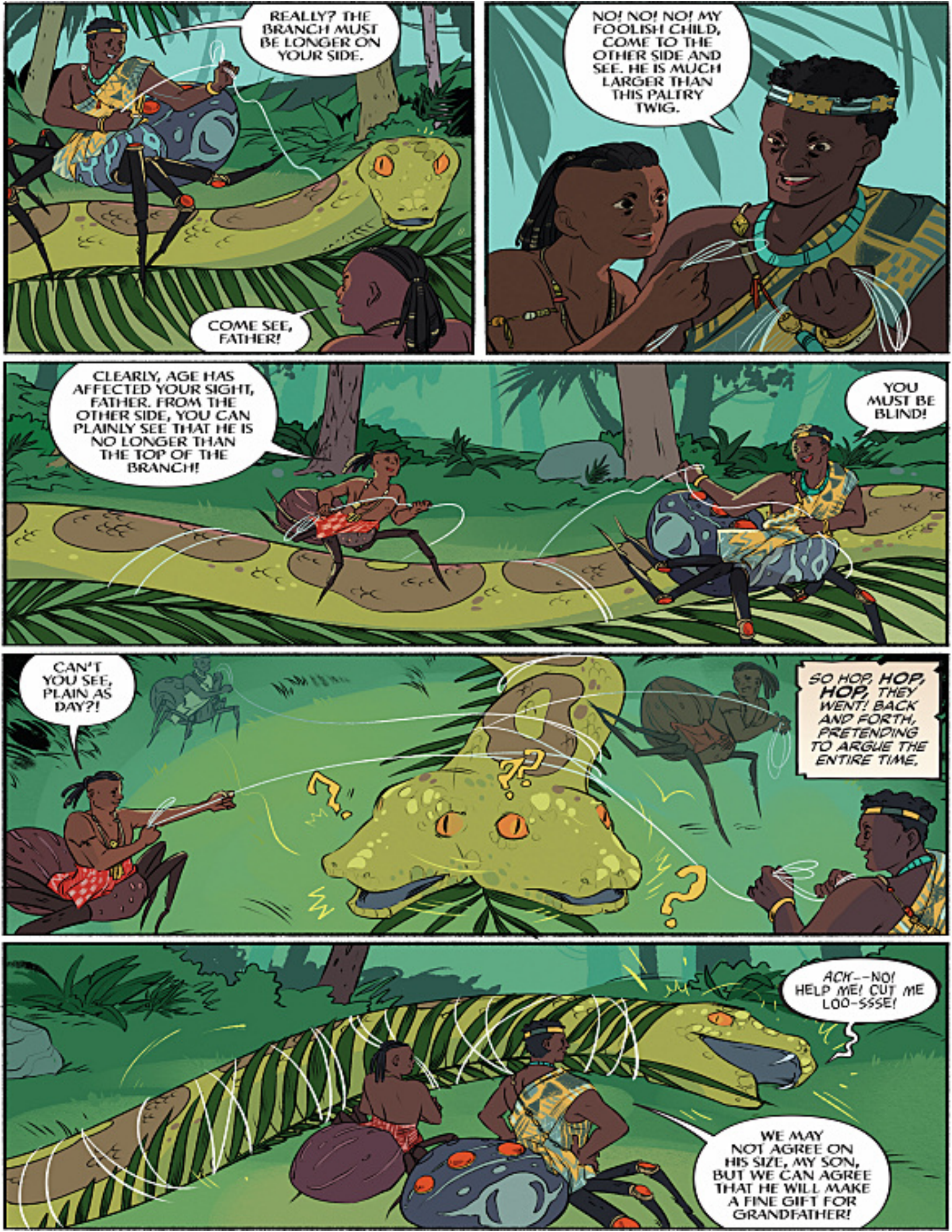
IN THE BEGINNING, HUMANKIND WAS BLAND AND FORMLESS, MOVING THROUGH THE WORLD WITH NO MORE DISTINCTION THAN LUMPS OF CLAY.
HOWEVER, THROUGH THEIR INTELLIGENCE, THEY BEGAN TO MASTER THIS WORLD.
GIFTED WITH THE ABILITY TO LEARN...
...BUT BURDENED WITH A STUBBORNNESS THAT SLOWED THE PASSING OF KNOWLEDGE.
THEY HOLD BETTER THIS WAY, SEE?
AWAY WITH YOU! PEST!
WHY WOULDN'T THEY JUST LISTEN TO EACH OTHER?
WELL, DO YOU LIKE BEING TOLD WHAT TO DO?
PAWS OFF THE TABLE, PLEASE.
WOOF!
NOW, WHERE WERE WE...

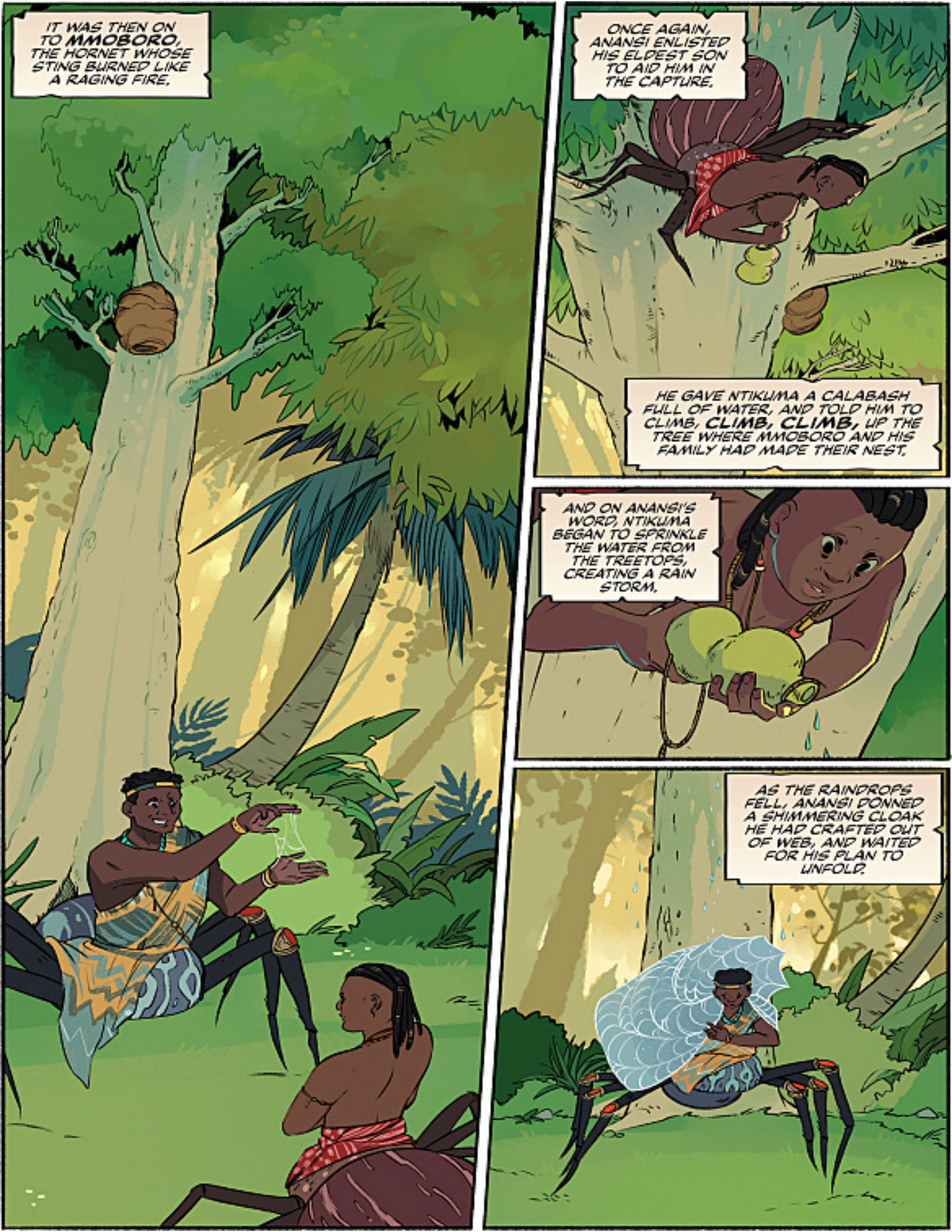

SO, WITH NO ONE TO LISTEN TO THEM, WHERE WERE ALL OF HUMANITY'S STRAY THOUGHTS TO GO? THEY FLOATED UP...
...UP...
...UP!
DEEP INTO THE BLACKENED NIGHT, WHERE THEY BECAME CAUGHT IN THE SILKEN WEB...
...OF ANANSI--
--TRICKSTER SON OF THE SKY GOD, NYAME, WITH THE BODY OF A MASSIVE SPIDER, AND THE TORSO AND FACE OF A MAN!
A STORY,
WITH HIS HANDS, ANANSI BUNDLED UP ALL OF THOSE THOUGHTS AND EXPERIENCES UNTIL THEY BECAME STORIES.
A STORY,
LET IT COME,
LET IT GO.
AFTER WHICH HE WOULD CLIMB...CLIMB... CLIMB! UP TO HIS FATHER'S KINGDOM IN THE SKY.


AND UPON ARRIVAL, HE WOULD PRESENT HIS FATHER WITH NEW STORIES...
...ADDING THEM TO THE GREAT POT WHERE ALL THE STORIES IN THE WORLD WERE KEPT, ALONG WITH THE WISDOM THEY HELD INSIDE.
AS HE ADDED TO THE POT, ANANSI WOULD SENSE BUT A TASTE OF THIS WISDOM.
A TASTE HE DEVELOPED A HUNGER FOR, AND WOULD DO ANYTHING TO SATIATE.
ONE DAY, HE HATCHED A PLAN HE HOPED WOULD RESULT IN POSSESSING ALL OF THE WISDOM IN THE WORLD.
FATHER! I BEG OF YOU! THE WORLD BELOW HAS BECOME SO DREARY, SO LIFELESS. I FEAR HOW IT MAY REFLECT ON MY FATHER'S HOUSE, WITH SUBJECTS AS DULL AS THE ONES BELOW.
AND WHAT DO YOU PROPOSE, MY SON? THAT I SIMPLY GIVE AWAY ALL THE WISDOM I HAVE GATHERED? HA!
NEVER! I OFFER TO BUY THEM, SO THAT I MAY BE THE ONE TO DISTRIBUTE THEM, AND SHARE THE STORIES OF YOUR MAJESTY.

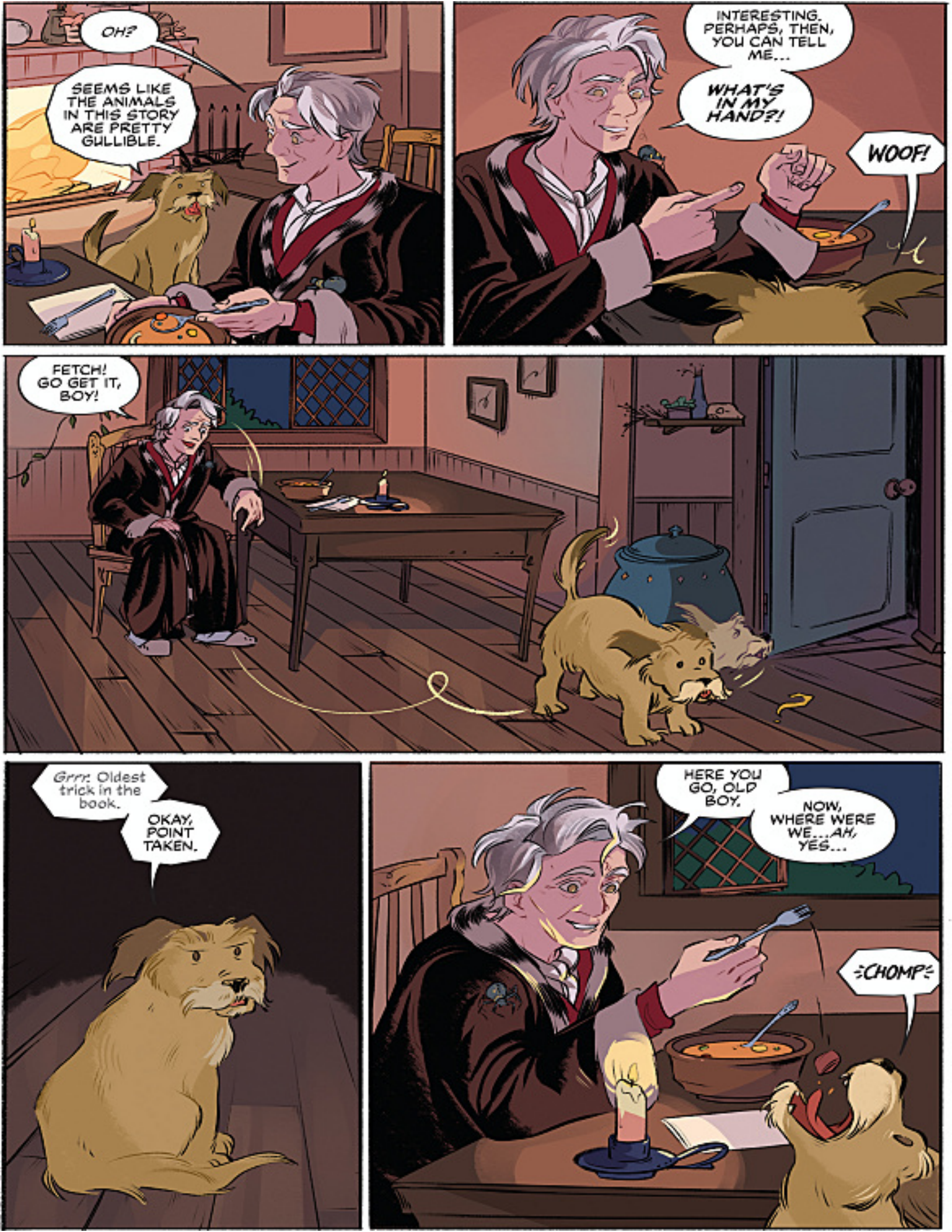

YOUR WORDS ARE SWEET AS HONEY, MY SON, BUT I HAVE BEEN OFFERED COUNTLESS TREASURES FROM THE LARGEST KINGDOMS IN OUR WORLD.
THERE IS NO AMOUNT OF JEWELS OR GOLD THAT WOULD MAKE ME PART WITH MY PRECIOUS STORIES.
FOOLISH ME, FATHER. I WISHED ONLY TO SPREAD YOUR GLORY. I WOULD GLADLY PAY ANY PRICE TO DO SO.
...
VERY WELL, THEN. IT WOULD BE CRUEL OF ME TO DENY MY SON THE CHANCE TO AID HIS FAMILY.
THREE TASKS SHALL I GIVE TO YOU--IMPOSSIBLE FEATS, WHICH WOULD PROVE YOUR WORTHINESS TO BECOME THE KEEPER OF OUR STORIES.
I TASK YOU WITH THE CAPTURE OF *ONINI* THE PYTHON, *MMOBORO* THE HORNET, AND A *MMOATIA* FAIRY OF THE FOREST.
DELIVER ALL THREE CREATURES TO ME, ANANSI, AND THE PRIZE SHALL BE YOURS.
OH, THANK YOU, FATHER! I SHALL NOT DISAPPOINT!

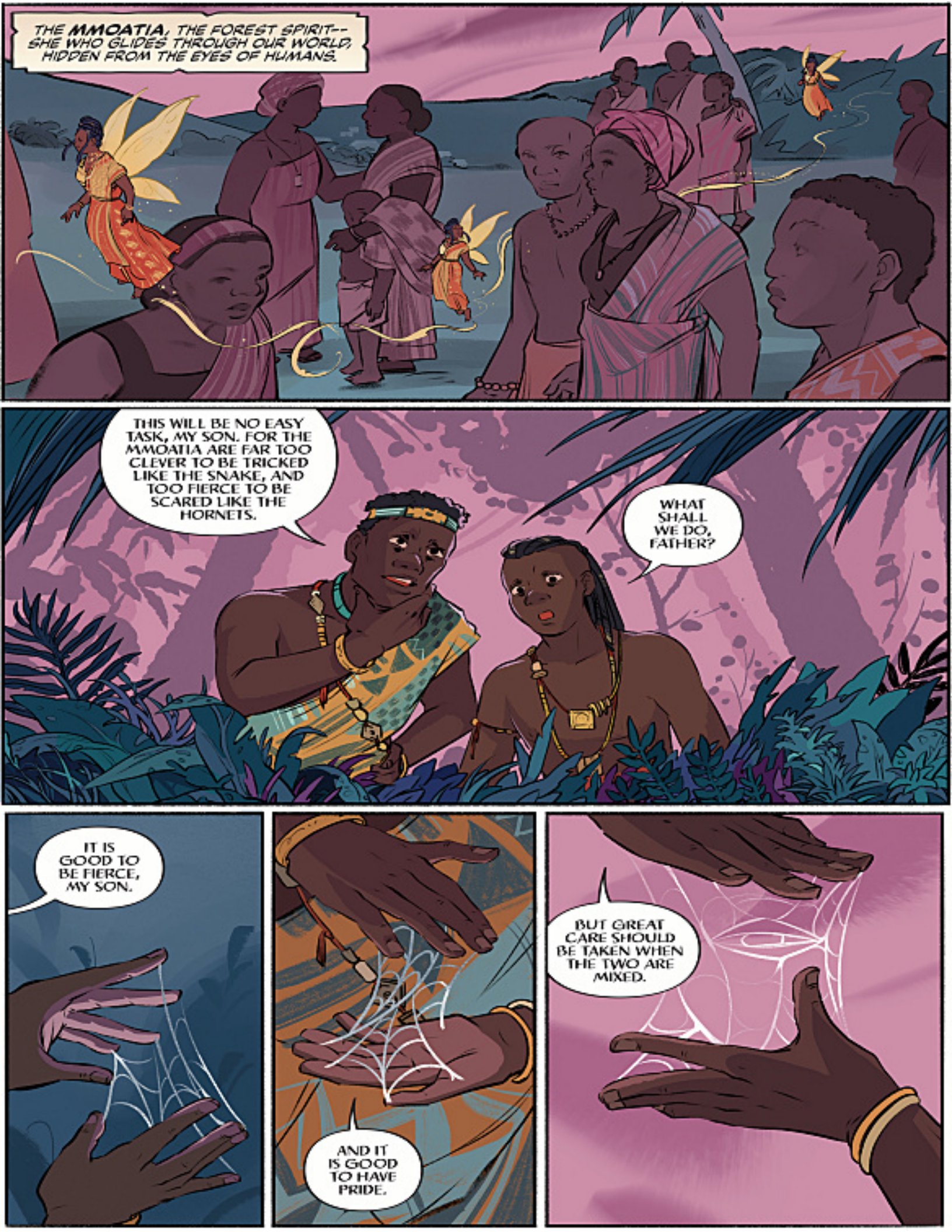
ANANSI'S FIRST TARGET WAS ONINI, THE GIANT PYTHON WHO STALKED THE JUNGLE.
BEING SO LARGE, ONINI WAS AFRAID OF NO ONE, AND WAS GOING ABOUT HIS BUSINESS WHEN HE HEARD SOMEONE MENTION HIS NAME.
WRONG! ONINI IS NO MERE GRASS SNAKE!
OH?!
ONINI FOUND ANANSI, WHO HAD EMPLOYED HIS ELDEST SON, NTIKUMA, TO AID HIM IN HIS QUEST.
PERHAPS-SSS I CAN BE OF ASSI-SSS-STANCE, MORSELS.
OH, MY! THE GREAT ONINI! I WAS JUST CORRECTING MY SON, WHO SAYS YOU ARE THE LENGTH OF A PALM TREE BRANCH.
AND OBVIOUSLY YOU ARE MUCH LARGER THAN THAT!
I AGREE, BUT THERE IS-SSS ONLY ONE WAY TO FIND OUT!
YOU HUMBLE US WITH YOUR COOPERATION, GREAT ONE!
AS I SAID, FATHER. THE MAGNIFICENT ONINI IS NEARLY AS LONG AS THIS BRANCH!
NEARLY?! I HAVEN'T EVEN BEGUN TO STRETCH, YOUNG ONE!

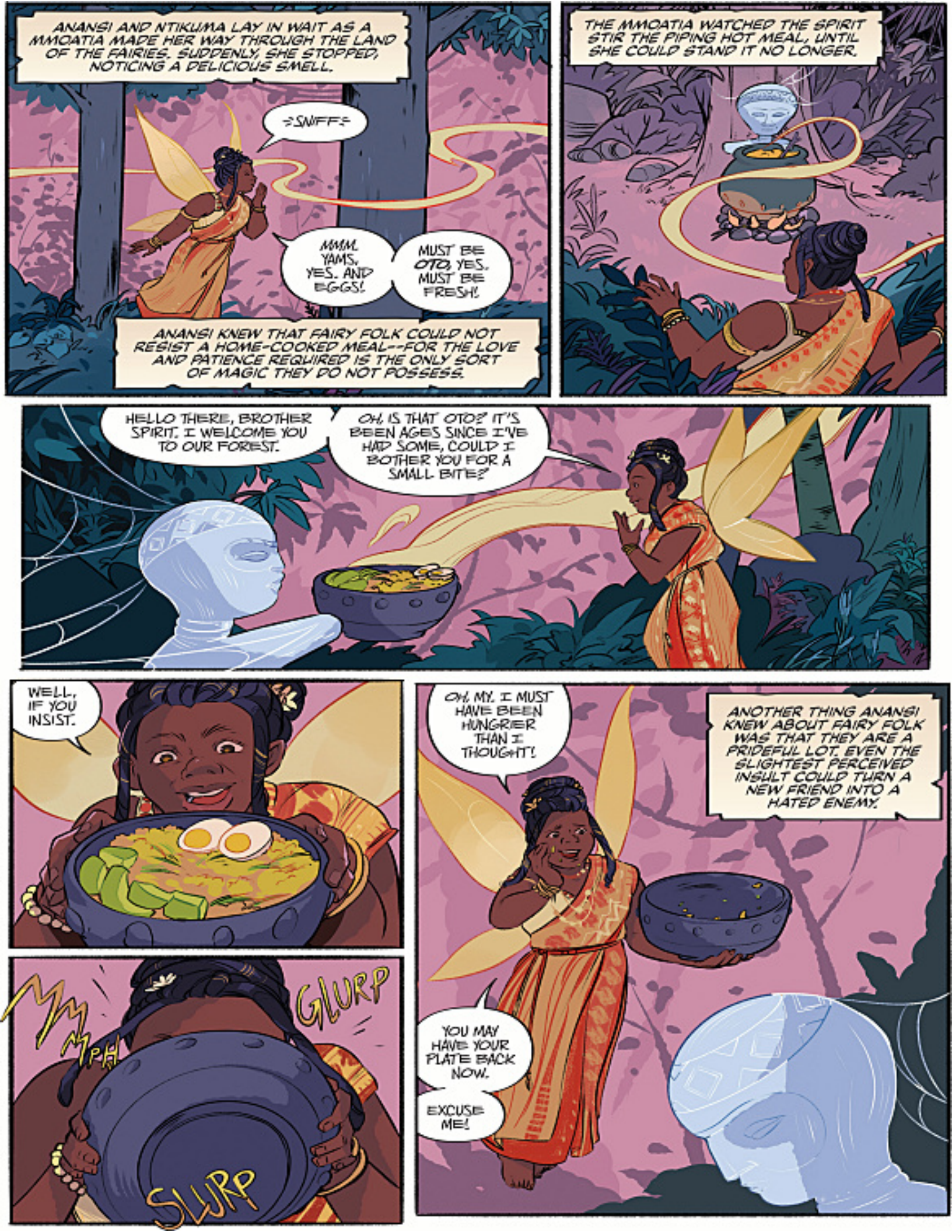

REALLY? THE BRANCH MUST BE LONGER ON YOUR SIDE.
COME SEE, FATHER!
NO! NO! NO! MY FOOLISH CHILD, COME TO THE OTHER SIDE AND SEE. HE IS MUCH LARGER THAN THIS PALTRY TWIG.
CLEARLY, AGE HAS AFFECTED YOUR SIGHT, FATHER. FROM THE OTHER SIDE, YOU CAN PLAINLY SEE THAT HE IS NO LONGER THAN THE TOP OF THE BRANCH!
YOU MUST BE BLIND!
CAN'T YOU SEE, PLAIN AS DAY?!
SO HOP, HOP, HOP, THEY WENT! BACK AND FORTH, PRETENDING TO ARGUE THE ENTIRE TIME.
ACK--NO! HELP ME! CUT ME LOO-SSSE!
WE MAY NOT AGREE ON HIS SIZE, MY SON, BUT WE CAN AGREE THAT HE WILL MAKE A FINE GIFT FOR GRANDFATHER!


IT WAS THEN ON TO MMOBORO, THE HORNET WHOSE STING BURNED LIKE A RAGING FIRE.
ONCE AGAIN, ANANSI ENLISTED HIS ELDEST SON TO AID HIM IN THE CAPTURE.
HE GAVE NTIKUMA A CALABASH FULL OF WATER, AND TOLD HIM TO CLIMB, CLIMB, CLIMB, UP THE TREE WHERE MMOBORO AND HIS FAMILY HAD MADE THEIR NEST.
AND ON ANANSI'S WORD, NTIKUMA BEGAN TO SPRINKLE THE WATER FROM THE TREETOPS, CREATING A RAIN STORM.
AS THE RAINDROPS FELL, ANANSI DONNED A SHIMMERING CLOAK HE HAD CRAFTED OUT OF WEB, AND WAITED FOR HIS PLAN TO UNFOLD.

WHO DARES ATTACK US?! WHO BEGS FOR THE FIERY STING OF MMOBORO?!
JUST A FRIENDLY TRAVELER, CAUGHT IN A SUDDEN STORM!
GAH!
QUICKLY, BROTHERS! HIDE UNDER MY CLOAK BEFORE YOU ARE OVER-WHELMED BY THE RAIN!
AS THE HORNETS DREW CLOSER, ANANSI QUICKLY SWUNG HIS CLOAK, AND CAUGHT THEM ALL IN AN INESCAPABLE WEB.
AND THAT IS HOW THE REIGN OF MMOBORO THE HORNET CAME TO AN END.
I DON'T KNOW, THAT SEEMS A LITTLE FISHY TO ME!

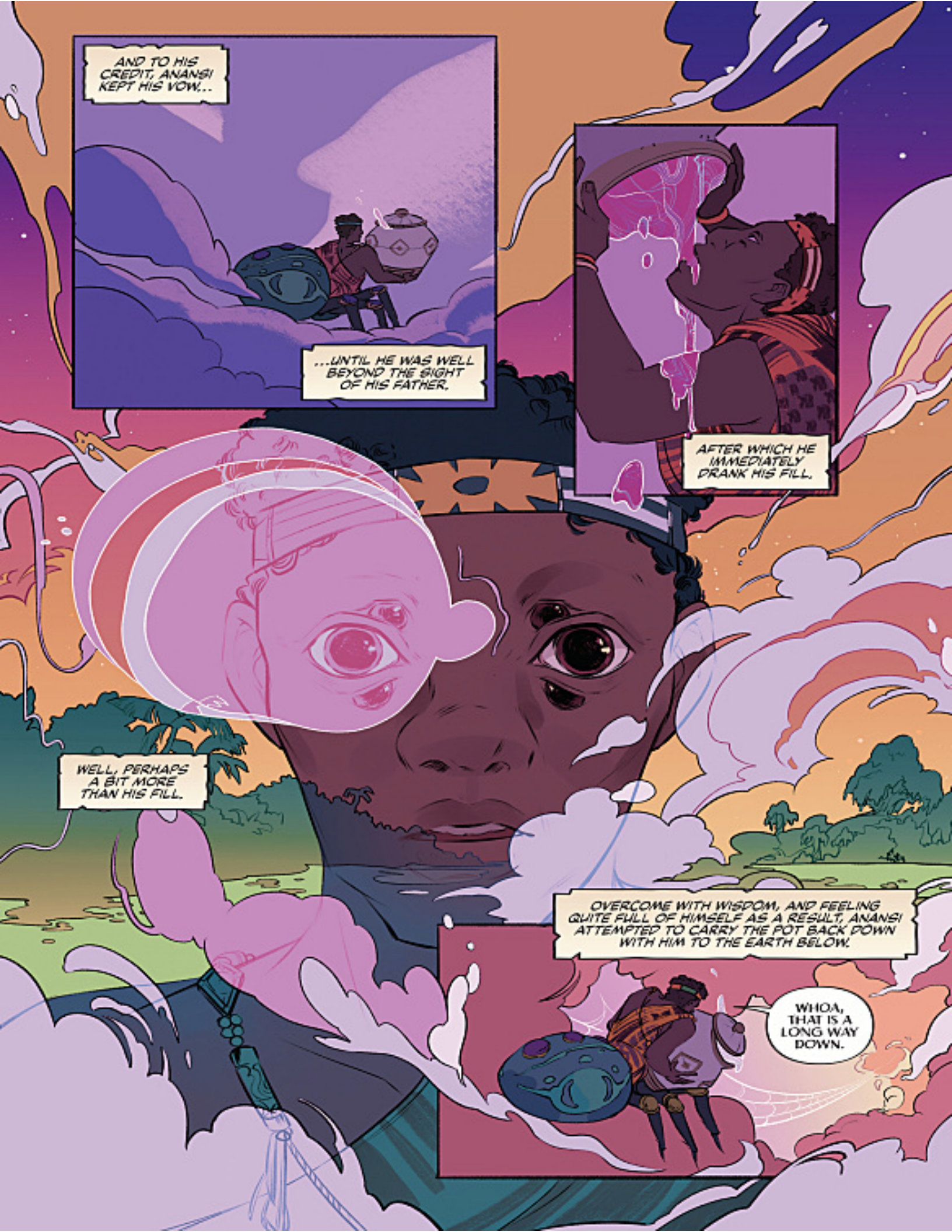

OH?
SEEMS LIKE THE ANIMALS IN THIS STORY ARE PRETTY GULLIBLE.
INTERESTING. PERHAPS, THEN, YOU CAN TELL ME...
WHAT'S IN MY HAND?!
WOOF!
FETCH! GO GET IT, BOY!
?
Grrr. Oldest trick in the book.
OKAY, POINT TAKEN.
HERE YOU GO, OLD BOY.
NOW, WHERE WERE WE...AH, YES...
:CHOMP:

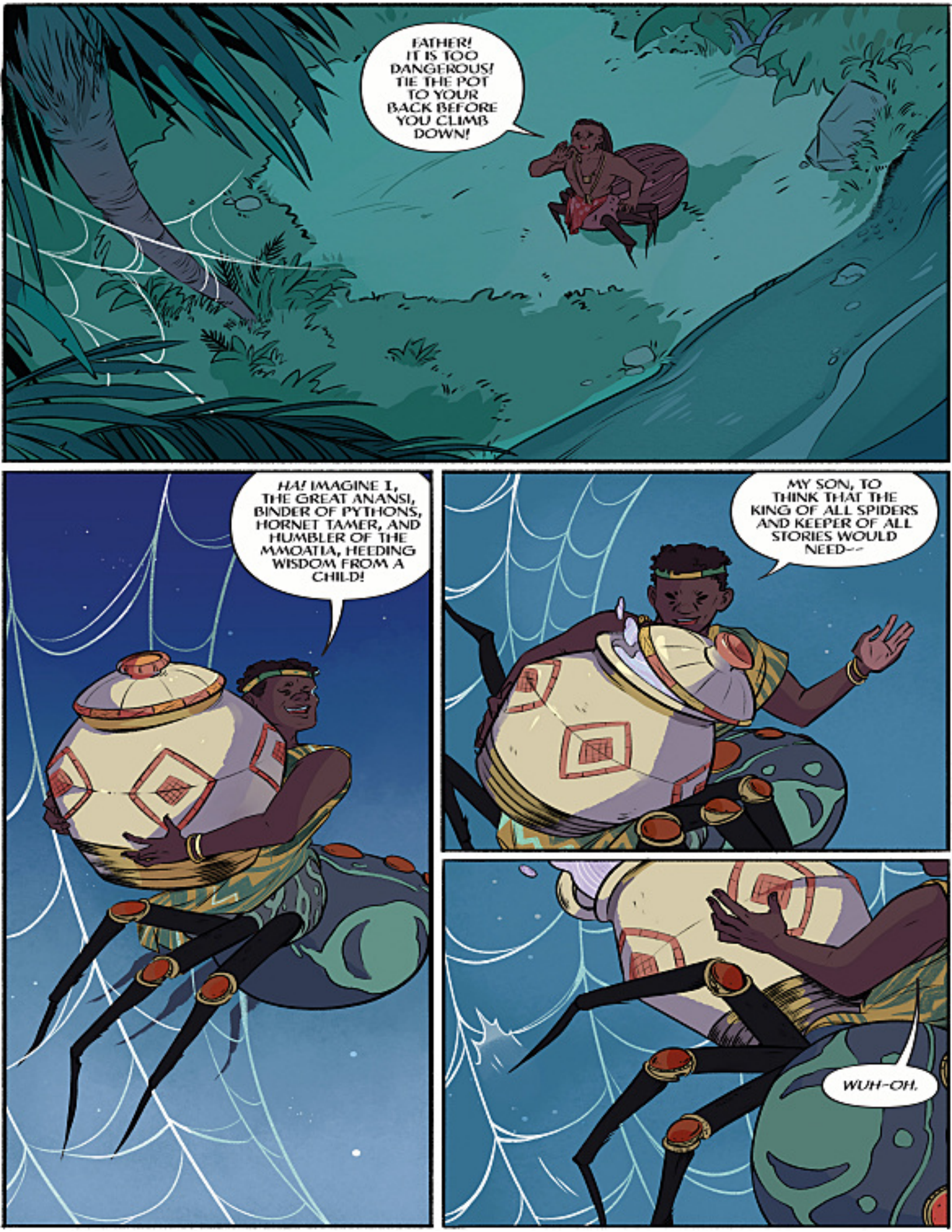

THE MMOATIA, THE FOREST SPIRIT-- SHE WHO GLIDES THROUGH OUR WORLD, HIDDEN FROM THE EYES OF HUMANS.
THIS WILL BE NO EASY TASK, MY SON. FOR THE MMOATIA ARE FAR TOO CLEVER TO BE TRICKED LIKE THE SNAKE, AND TOO FIERCE TO BE SCARED LIKE THE HORNETS.
WHAT SHALL WE DO, FATHER?
IT IS GOOD TO BE FIERCE, MY SON.
AND IT IS GOOD TO HAVE PRIDE.
BUT GREAT CARE SHOULD BE TAKEN WHEN THE TWO ARE MIXED.

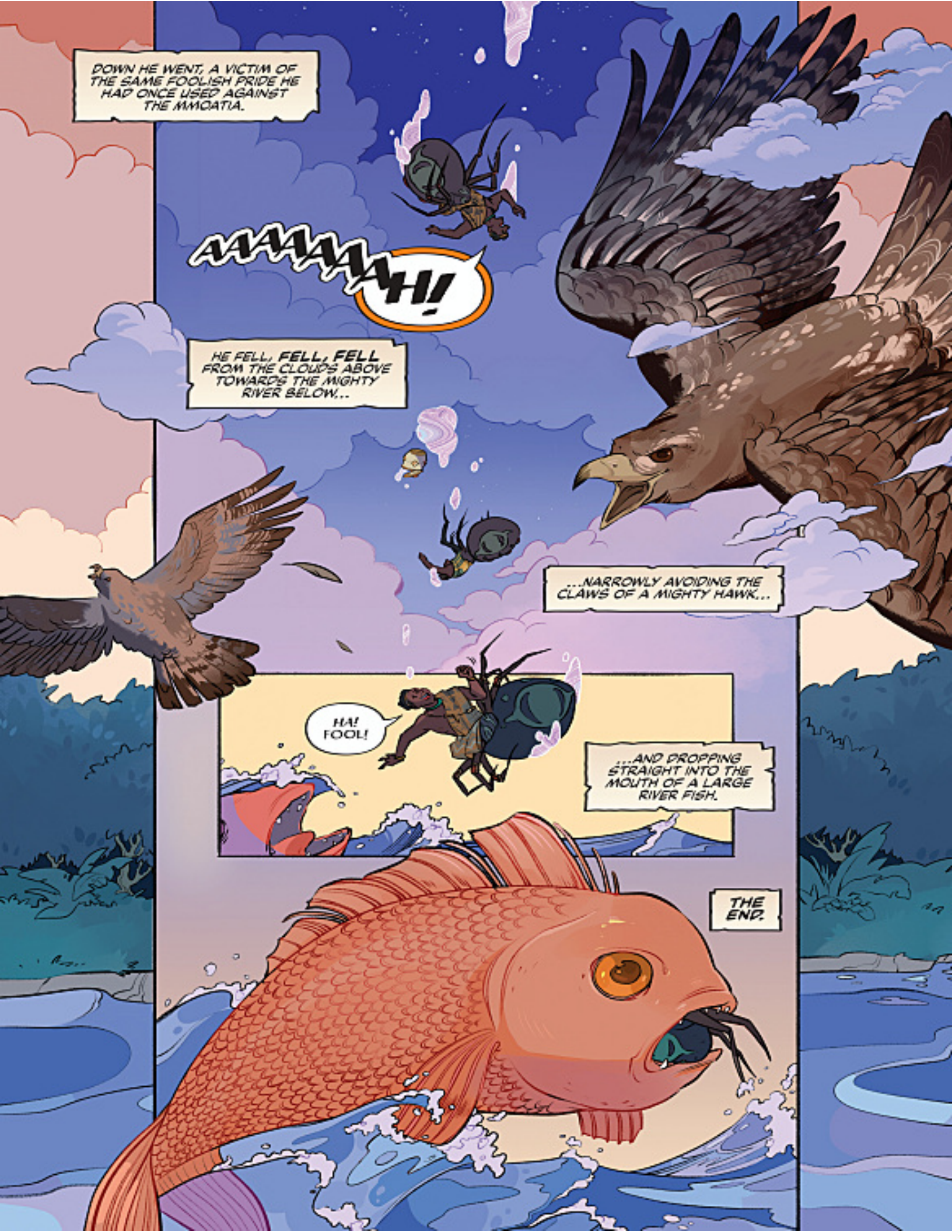

ANANSI AND NTIKUMA LAY IN WAIT AS A MMOATIA MADE HER WAY THROUGH THE LAND OF THE FAIRIES. SUDDENLY, SHE STOPPED, NOTICING A DELICIOUS SMELL.
=SNIFF=
MMM. YAMS. YES. AND EGGS!
MUST BE OTO, YES. MUST BE FRESH!
ANANSI KNEW THAT FAIRY FOLK COULD NOT RESIST A HOME-COOKED MEAL--FOR THE LOVE AND PATIENCE REQUIRED IS THE ONLY SORT OF MAGIC THEY DO NOT POSSESS.
THE MMOATIA WATCHED THE SPIRIT STIR THE PIPING HOT MEAL, UNTIL SHE COULD STAND IT NO LONGER.
HELLO THERE, BROTHER SPIRIT. I WELCOME YOU TO OUR FOREST.
OH, IS THAT OTO? IT'S BEEN AGES SINCE I'VE HAD SOME, COULD I BOTHER YOU FOR A SMALL BITE?
WELL, IF YOU INSIST.
MPH
GLURP
SLURP
OH, MY. I MUST HAVE BEEN HUNGRIER THAN I THOUGHT!
ANOTHER THING ANANSI KNEW ABOUT FAIRY FOLK WAS THAT THEY ARE A PRIDEFUL LOT. EVEN THE SLIGHTEST PERCEIVED INSULT COULD TURN A NEW FRIEND INTO A HATED ENEMY.
YOU MAY HAVE YOUR PLATE BACK NOW.
EXCUSE ME!

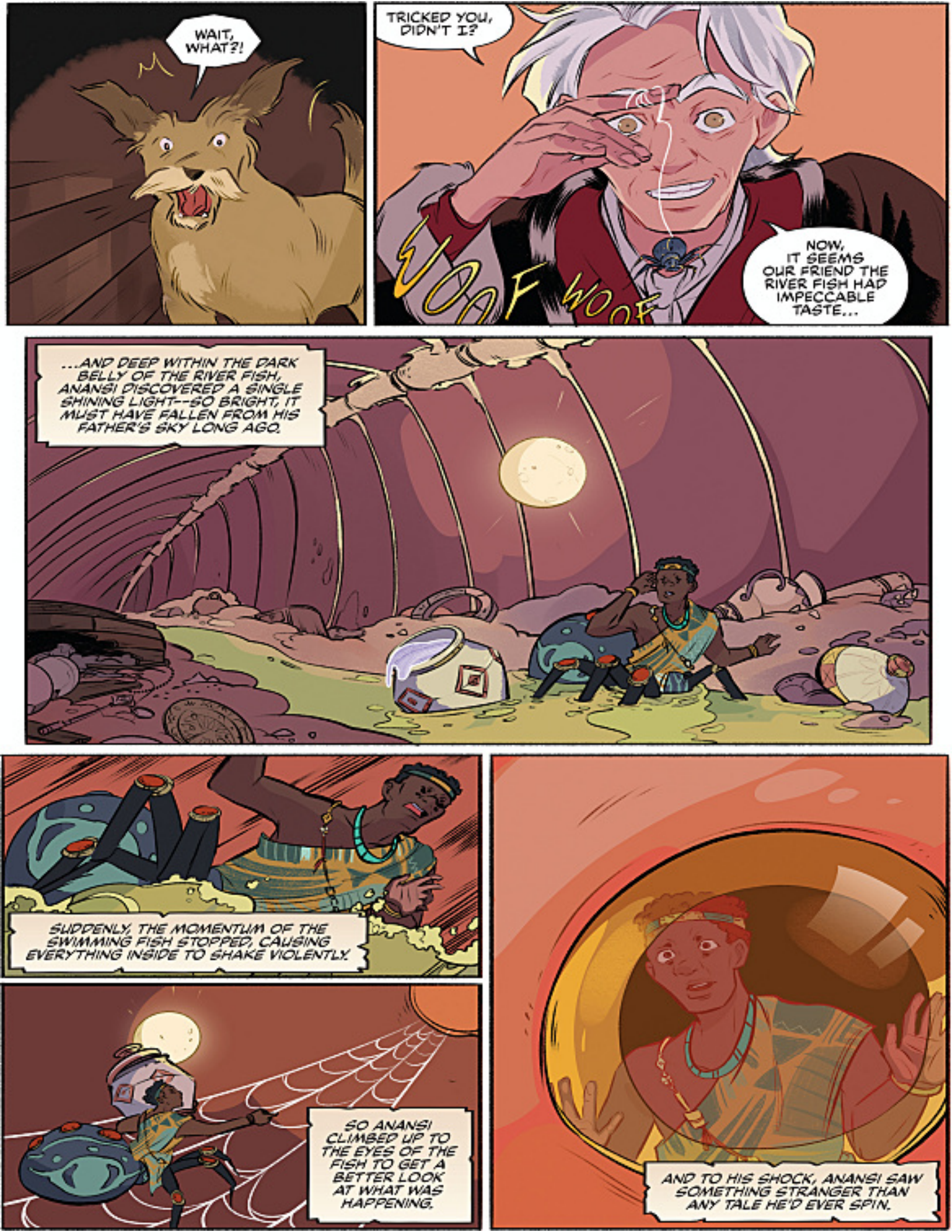
YOU MUST BE NEW TO THIS FOREST, STRANGER! HERE WE HAVE MANNERS.
HERE WE DO NOT SIMPLY IGNORE THE MMOATIA, ESPECIALLY WHEN THEY HAVE BEEN SO GRACIOUS!
ARE YOU ASLEEP? AM I BORING YOU?!
WAKE UP!
WHAT?!
THE NERVE! UNHAND ME!
THE MORE THE MMOATIA STRUGGLED, THE MORE SHE BECAME BOUND--WRAPPING HERSELF UP IN A NEAT LITTLE BUNDLE, READY TO BE BROUGHT TO NYAME.

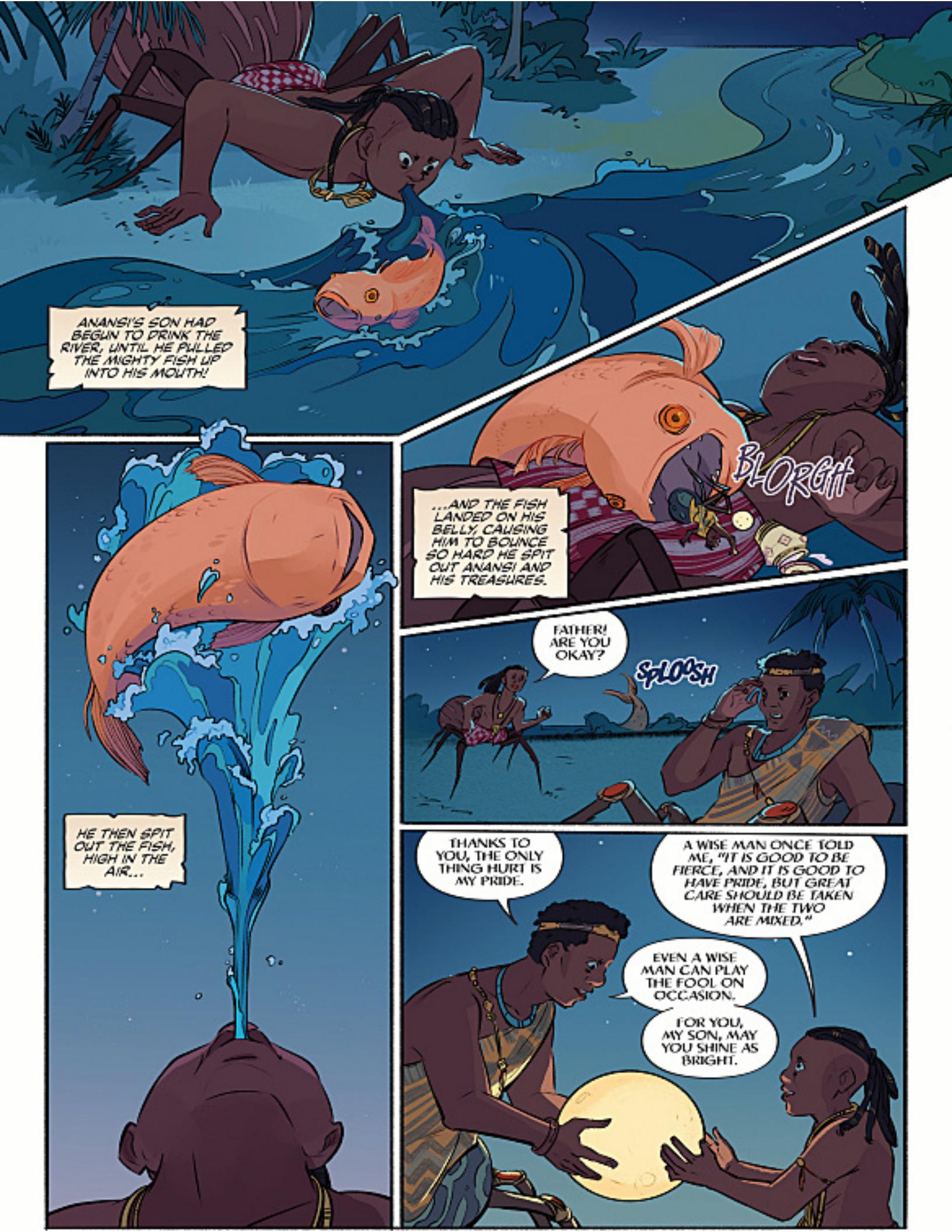
UP...UP...UP CLIMBED ANANSI, BACK TO HIS FATHER'S KINGDOM, WHERE HE PRESENTED HIS OFFERINGS TO NYAME.
FATHER, I GIVE TO YOU THE GREAT ONINI, MMOBORO, AND THE MMOATIA!
WITH YOUR CUNNING, WIT, AND SKILL, YOU HAVE FOUND SUCCESS IN THE MOST CHALLENGING OF TASKS.
YOU HAVE PROVEN YOURSELF WORTHY TO DISPENSE THIS WISDOM AS YOU SEE FIT.
THANK YOU, FATHER. I SHALL NOT FAIL YOU.

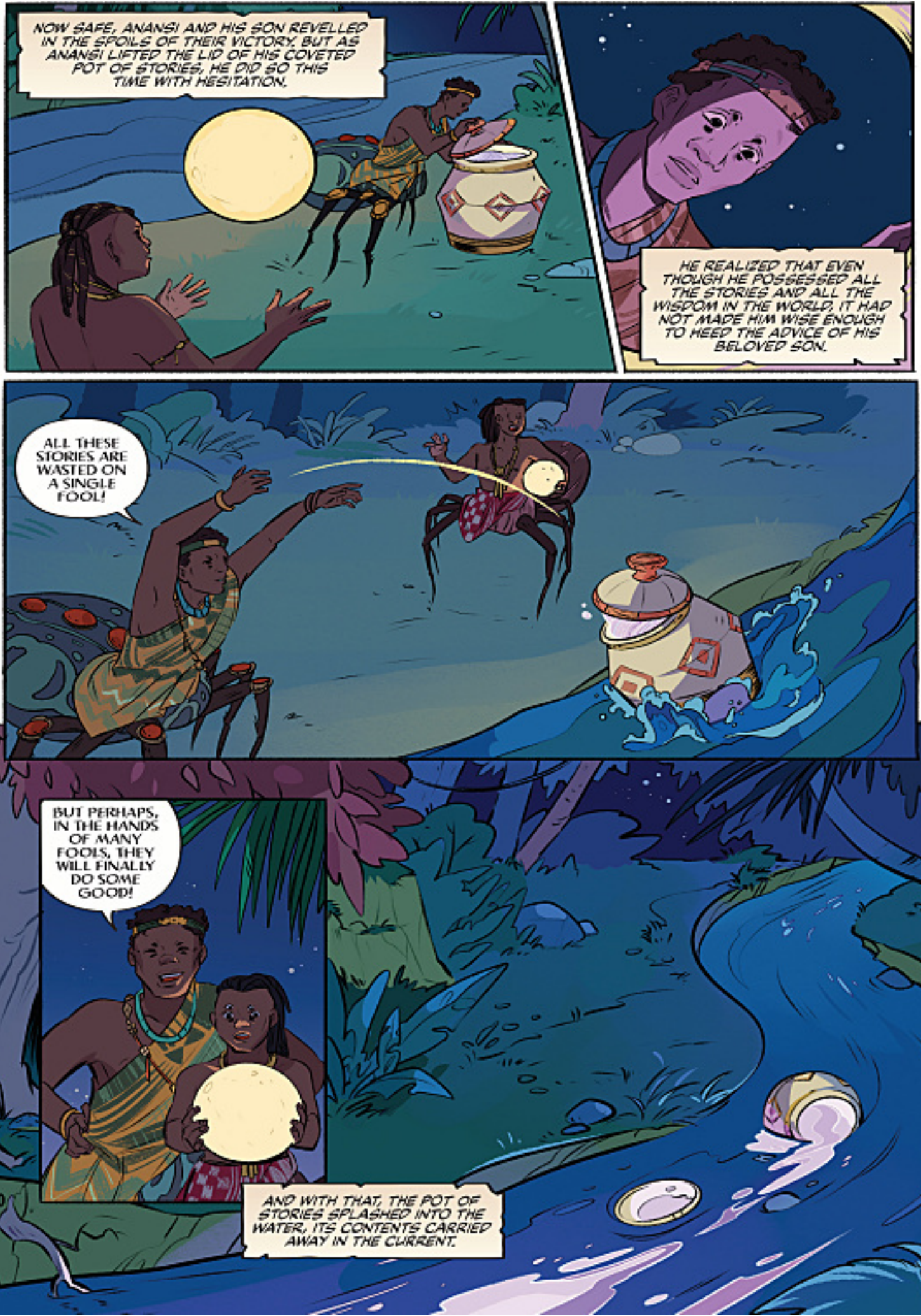

AND TO HIS CREDIT, ANANSI KEPT HIS VOW...
...UNTIL HE WAS WELL BEYOND THE SIGHT OF HIS FATHER.
AFTER WHICH HE IMMEDIATELY DRANK HIS FILL.
WELL, PERHAPS A BIT MORE THAN HIS FILL.
OVERCOME WITH WISDOM, AND FEELING QUITE FULL OF HIMSELF AS A RESULT, ANANSI ATTEMPTED TO CARRY THE POT BACK DOWN WITH HIM TO THE EARTH BELOW.
WHOA, THAT IS A LONG WAY DOWN.

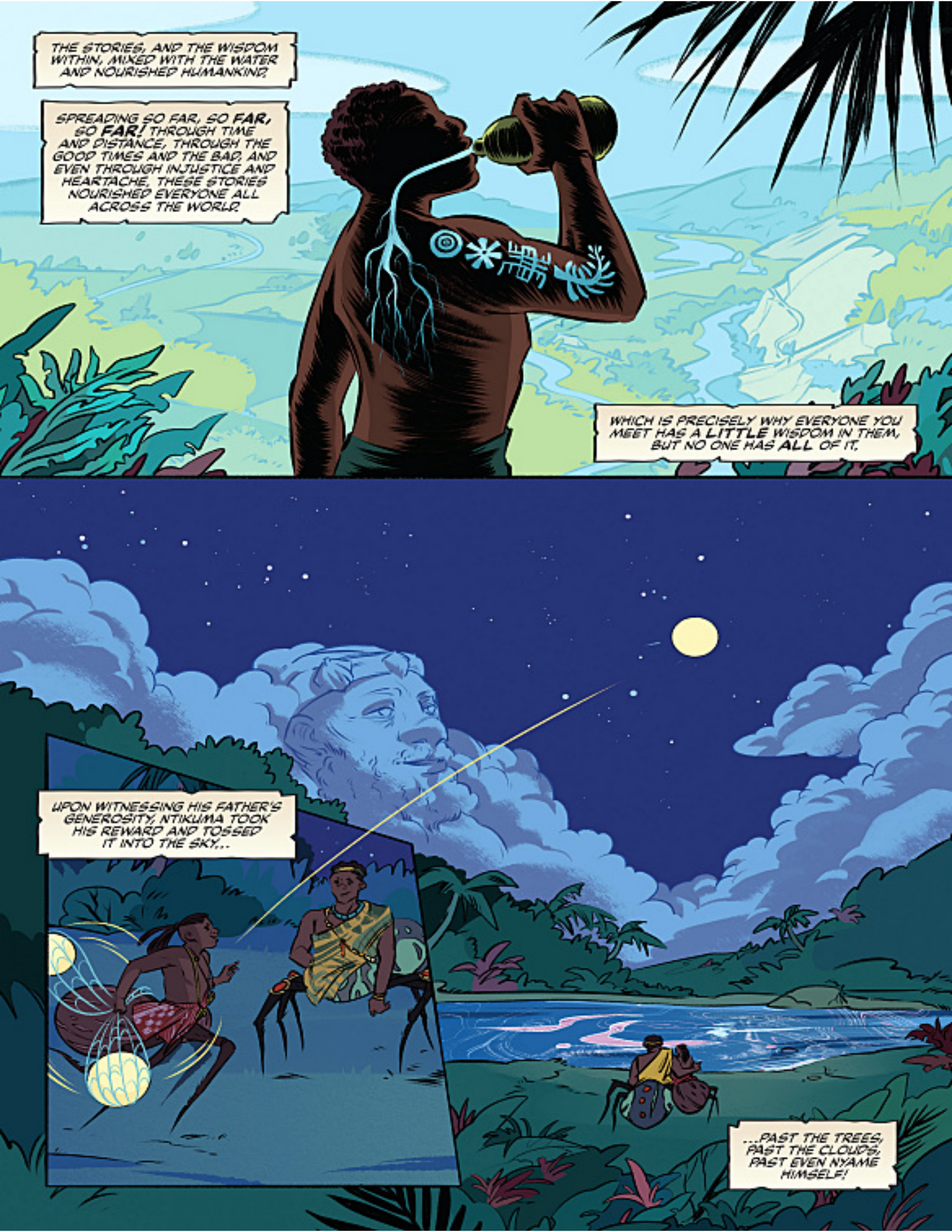

FATHER! IT IS TOO DANGEROUS! TIE THE POT TO YOUR BACK BEFORE YOU CLIMB DOWN!
HA! IMAGINE I, THE GREAT ANANSI, BINDER OF PYTHONS, HORNET TAMER, AND HUMBLER OF THE MMOATIA, HEEDING WISDOM FROM A CHILD!
MY SON, TO THINK THAT THE KING OF ALL SPIDERS AND KEEPER OF ALL STORIES WOULD NEED--
WUH-OH.

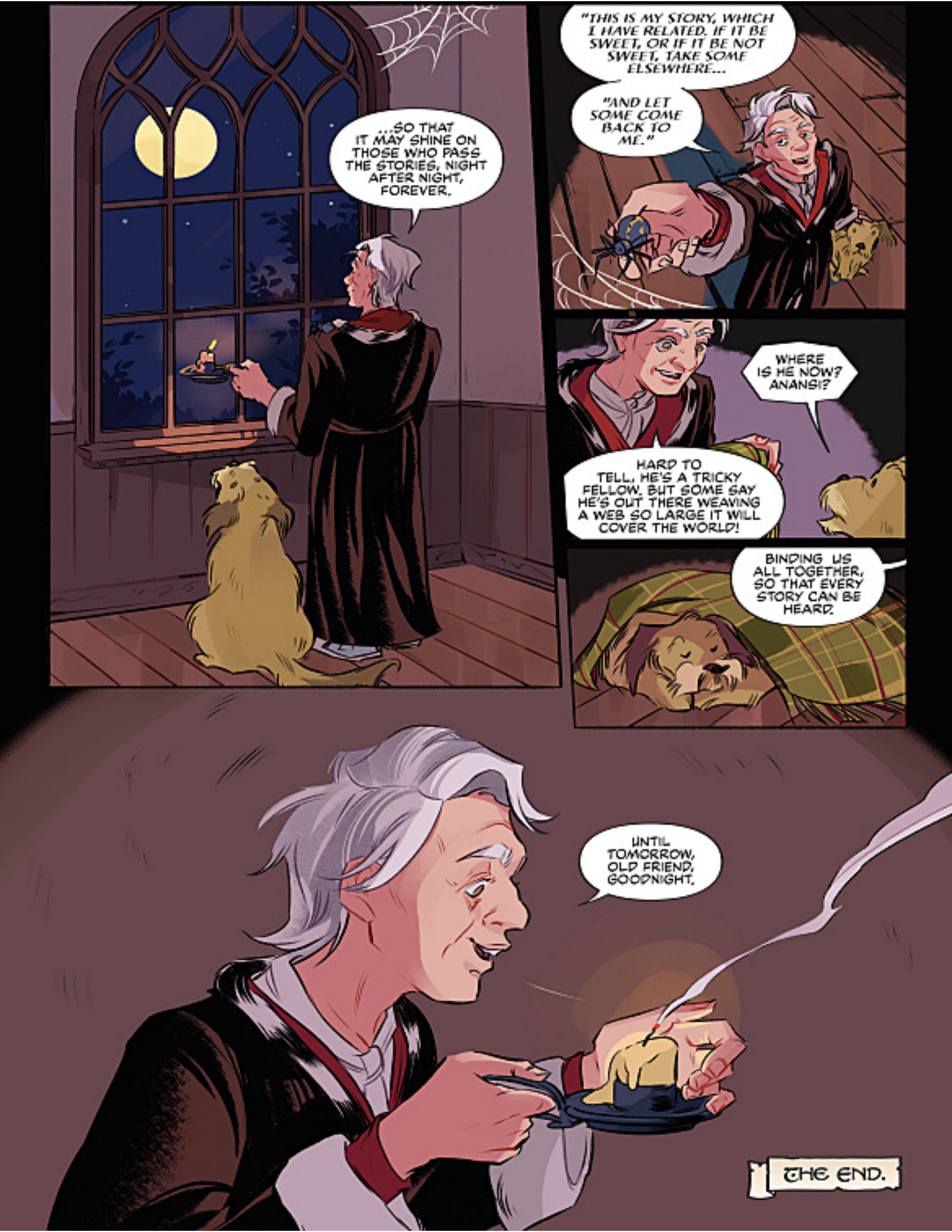

DOWN HE WENT, A VICTIM OF THE SAME FOOLISH PRIDE HE HAD ONCE USED AGAINST THE MMOATIA.
AAAAAAAH!
HE FELL, FELL, FELL FROM THE CLOUDS ABOVE TOWARDS THE MIGHTY RIVER BELOW...
...NARROWLY AVOIDING THE CLAWS OF A MIGHTY HAWK...
HA! FOOL!
...AND DROPPING STRAIGHT INTO THE MOUTH OF A LARGE RIVER FISH.
THE END.


WAIT, WHAT?!
TRICKED YOU, DIDN'T I?
WOOF WOOF
NOW, IT SEEMS OUR FRIEND THE RIVER FISH HAD IMPECCABLE TASTE...
...AND DEEP WITHIN THE DARK BELLY OF THE RIVER FISH, ANANSI DISCOVERED A SINGLE SHINING LIGHT--SO BRIGHT, IT MUST HAVE FALLEN FROM HIS FATHER'S SKY LONG AGO.
SUDDENLY, THE MOMENTUM OF THE SWIMMING FISH STOPPED, CAUSING EVERYTHING INSIDE TO SHAKE VIOLENTLY.
SO ANANSI CLIMBED UP TO THE EYES OF THE FISH TO GET A BETTER LOOK AT WHAT WAS HAPPENING.
AND TO HIS SHOCK, ANANSI SAW SOMETHING STRANGER THAN ANY TALE HE'D EVER SPIN.


ANANSI'S SON HAD BEGUN TO DRINK THE RIVER, UNTIL HE PULLED THE MIGHTY FISH UP INTO HIS MOUTH!
BLORGH
...AND THE FISH LANDED ON HIS BELLY, CAUSING HIM TO BOUNCE SO HARD HE SPIT OUT ANANSI AND HIS TREASURES.
FATHER! ARE YOU OKAY?
SPLOOSH
HE THEN SPIT OUT THE FISH, HIGH IN THE AIR...
THANKS TO YOU, THE ONLY THING HURT IS MY PRIDE.
A WISE MAN ONCE TOLD ME, "IT IS GOOD TO BE FIERCE, AND IT IS GOOD TO HAVE PRIDE, BUT GREAT CARE SHOULD BE TAKEN WHEN THE TWO ARE MIXED."
EVEN A WISE MAN CAN PLAY THE FOOL ON OCCASION.
FOR YOU, MY SON, MAY YOU SHINE AS BRIGHT.


NOW SAFE, ANANSI AND HIS SON REVELLED IN THE SPOILS OF THEIR VICTORY. BUT AS ANANSI LIFTED THE LID OF HIS COVETED POT OF STORIES, HE DID SO THIS TIME WITH HESITATION.
HE REALIZED THAT EVEN THOUGH HE POSSESSED ALL THE STORIES AND ALL THE WISDOM IN THE WORLD, IT HAD NOT MADE HIM WISE ENOUGH TO HEED THE ADVICE OF HIS BELOVED SON.
ALL THESE STORIES ARE WASTED ON A SINGLE FOOL!
BUT PERHAPS, IN THE HANDS OF MANY FOOLS, THEY WILL FINALLY DO SOME GOOD!
AND WITH THAT, THE POT OF STORIES SPLASHED INTO THE WATER, ITS CONTENTS CARRIED AWAY IN THE CURRENT.


THE STORIES, AND THE WISDOM WITHIN, MIXED WITH THE WATER AND NOURISHED HUMANKIND!
SPREADING SO FAR, SO **FAR**, SO **FAR!** THROUGH TIME AND DISTANCE, THROUGH THE GOOD TIMES AND THE BAD, AND EVEN THROUGH INJUSTICE AND HEARTACHE, THESE STORIES NOURISHED EVERYONE ALL ACROSS THE WORLD!
WHICH IS PRECISELY WHY EVERYONE YOU MEET HAS A **LITTLE** WISDOM IN THEM, BUT NO ONE HAS **ALL** OF IT.
UPON WITNESSING HIS FATHER'S GENEROSITY, NTIKUMA TOOK HIS REWARD AND TOSSED IT INTO THE SKY...
...PAST THE TREES, PAST THE CLOUDS, PAST EVEN NYAME HIMSELF!


...SO THAT IT MAY SHINE ON THOSE WHO PASS THE STORIES, NIGHT AFTER NIGHT, FOREVER.
"THIS IS MY STORY, WHICH I HAVE RELATED. IF IT BE SWEET, OR IF IT BE NOT SWEET, TAKE SOME ELSEWHERE...
"AND LET SOME COME BACK TO ME."
WHERE IS HE NOW? ANANSI?
HARD TO TELL, HE'S A TRICKY FELLOW. BUT SOME SAY HE'S OUT THERE WEAVING A WEB SO LARGE IT WILL COVER THE WORLD!
BINDING US ALL TOGETHER, SO THAT EVERY STORY CAN BE HEARD.
UNTIL TOMORROW, OLD FRIEND, GOODNIGHT.
THE END.

TALE TWO VARIANT COVER
DANI PENDERGAST

a Heart that Beats Forever

The mythical trickster most people are likely to associate with West Africa is Anansi the Spider, the clever and often foolhardy hero of children's folktales. However, West Africa is an extremely diverse area of several hundred ethnic groups, and so I wanted to write about a figure specific to the Yoruba, the tribe from which my mother is descended.

Eshu, god of tricks and messages, belongs to a deity pantheon called the *Orisha*. Eshu is a controversial immortal figure in some circles, as colonial translations of Yoruba tales misinterpreted Eshu as the equivalent of Satan. In reality, he often plays an amoral—and even benevolent—role in lore, appearing sometimes as a child or as an old man.

I played quite a bit with his age-shifting in the story, as I've always been fascinated (and perplexed) by another aspect of West African lore: that time is circular, and that we are both living out the future and the past of our ancestors. In this story, I interpreted time's circle to mean that we shape both past and future history with the stories we tell. After all, if a story is believed enough times, it ceases to matter whether or not it happened, because the effect it has on society is one-hundred percent real.

I also knew from the beginning that this story would be a romance. I so seldom see West Africa depicted in genre media as a place where people have meet-cutes, fall in love, and find whimsical, happily-ever-afters. Here's to many similar stories in the future, and I hope you enjoy this tale of a girl and a god as much as I loved writing it!

—Jordan Ifueko

RAP
RAP RAP
PELE, EXCUSE ME-- GRANT A POOR MAIDEN SHELTER FROM THE STORM? I'VE BEEN WALKING SO VERY LONG.
A VISITOR!
AN INTRUDER!
BORK. BORK. WHINE. WHINE. BORK.
FORGIVE MY HOUND, IT'S SIMPLY BEEN AGES SINCE WE'VE HAD ANY--
--COMPANY.
Baof?

I TOLD YOU HE'D WARM UP TO YOU!
YOU SHOULDN'T HAVE SCOLDED HIM, AFTER ALL, I'M A STRANGER...
AND PEOPLE ARE SELDOM AS THEY SEEM.
A FAVORITE SAYING OF MINE!
SIGH HERE HE GOES AGAIN.
ONCE UPON A TIME--
ACTUALLY, I'VE THOUGHT OF A STORY AS WELL.
...
SHALL I TELL IT? TO REPAY YOU BOTH FOR YOUR KINDNESS?

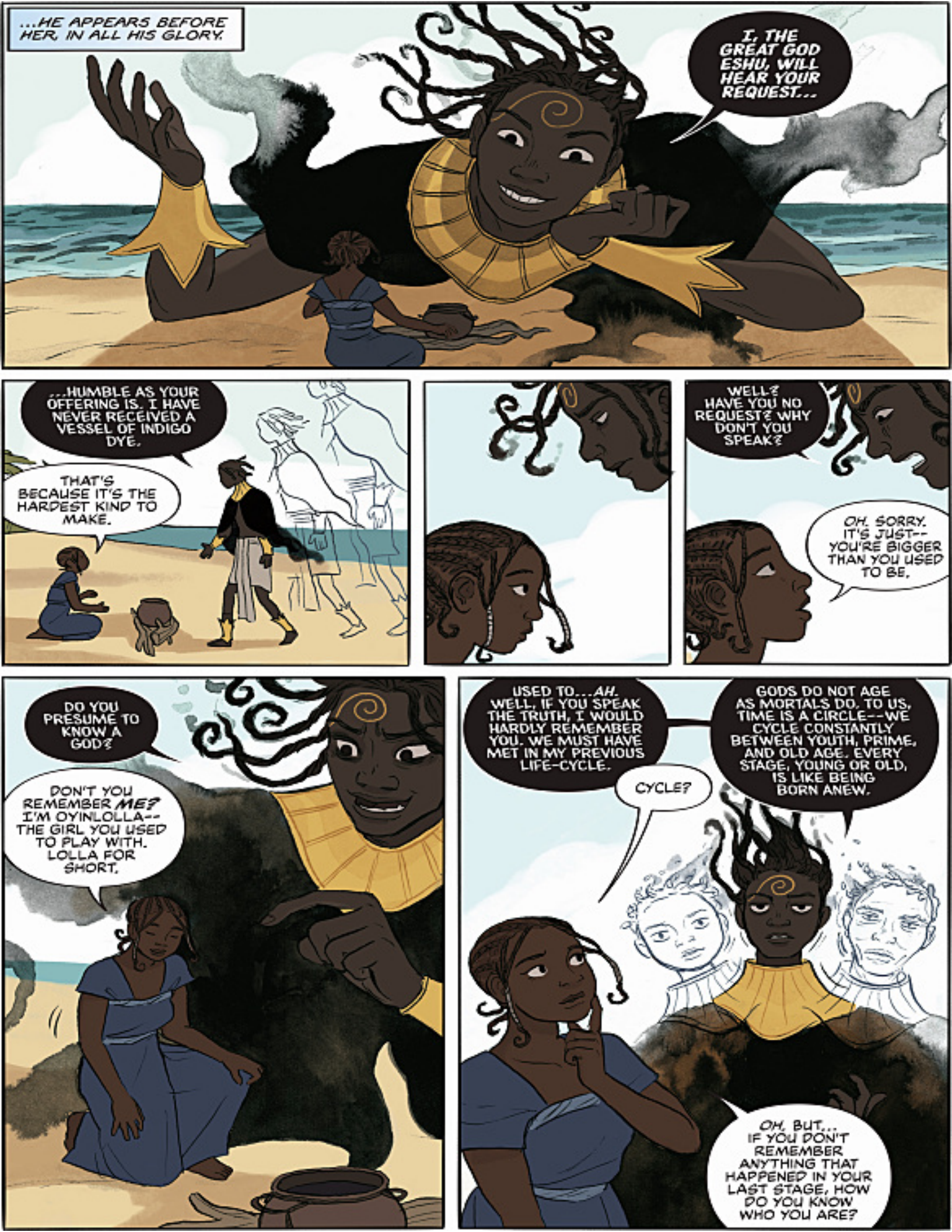
HEH. I'M OUT OF PRACTICE LISTENING TO STORIES.
YOU'RE OUT OF PRACTICE LISTENING PERIOD.
YOU'RE IN LUCK. IN MY HOMELAND, STORIES ARE GROUP ACTIVITIES. MOST PEOPLE LEARN THEIR PARTS AS CHILDREN, BUT I'LL TEACH YOU NOW.
I HOPE THIS TEA HAS WARMED UP YOUR SINGING VOICES...
SEVERAL TONE-DEAF MINUTES LATER...
GODS HELP ME...WELL, I SUPPOSE THAT'S AS GOOD AS WE'LL EVER GET. AHEM! HERE GOES.
WHAT IS A GOD?
SINGER, YOU WILL TELL US!
AHEM, I WILL NOT TELL A LIE. WHAT IS A STORY?
A HEART THAT BEATS FOREVER.
GOOD. NOW HEAR MY HEART.

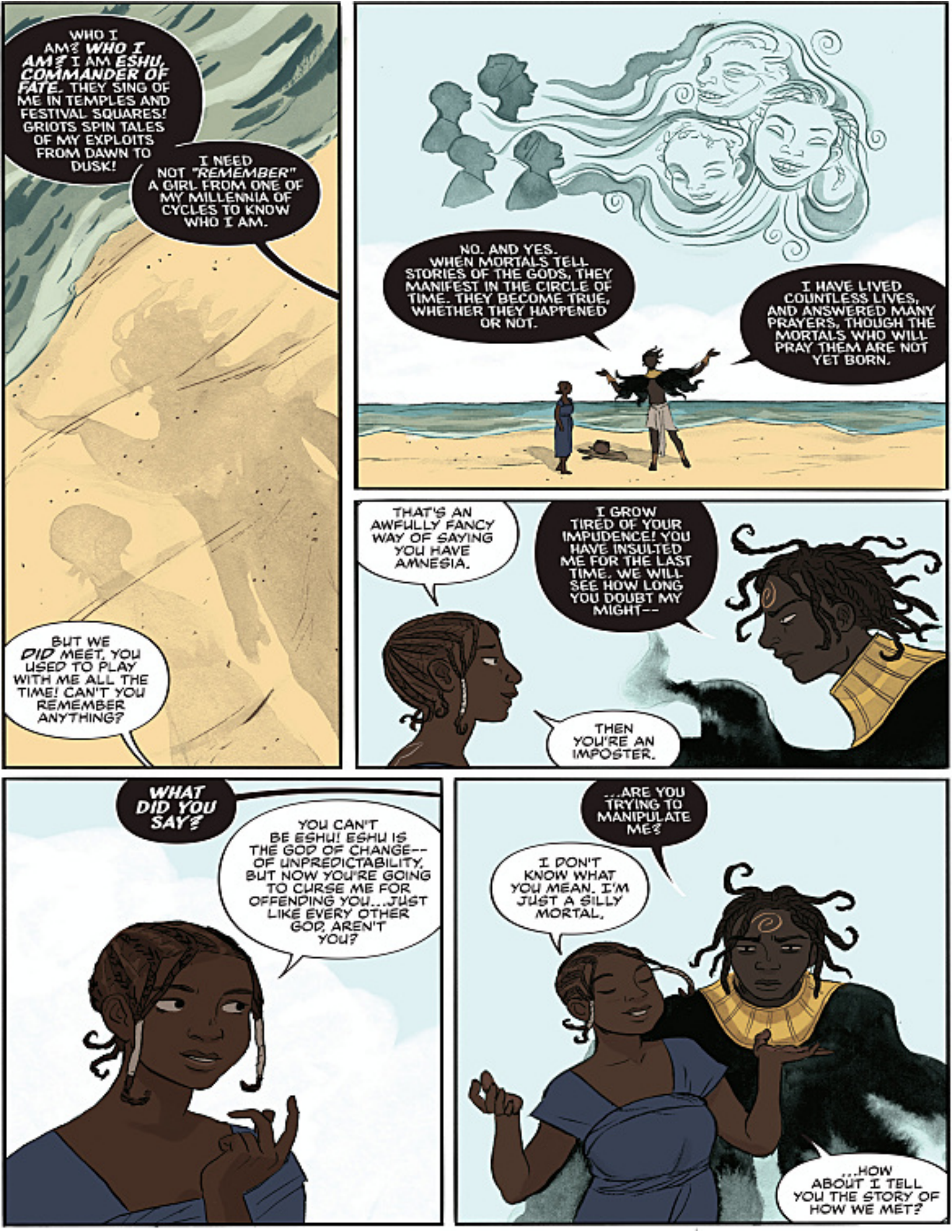
WHEN OLODUMARE, MASTER OF THE UNIVERSE, BREATHED TIME INTO BEING AND SENT HIS GODLING ORISHAS TO RULE THE WORLD, THEY CLAIMED US HUMANS AS THEIR DEVOTEES, MARKING US ONCE WE REACHED ADULTHOOD.
WE BOWED TO THEIR DIVINE WILL, LETTING THEIR MARKS DETERMINE OUR LIVES.
THOSE ALIGNED WITH SHANGO, GOD OF THUNDER, WOULD LEARN TRADES OF FIRE AND FORGES.
THOSE WITH OKO, GOD OF THE HUNT, WOULD BE GREAT WARRIORS.
THOSE WITH OSHUN, NURTURERS OF FAMILIES... AND SO ON. WE REVERED GODS AS CONSTANT. CONSISTENT.
FOR WHILE MORTALS ARE SLAVES TO OUR FAMILIES AND FRIENDS, TO HUNGER, LUST, AND THIRST...A GOD IS A SLAVE ONLY TO THEIR NATURE. HOW ELSE, WE REASONED, COULD THEY REIGN OVER CREATION?
BUT WE WERE WRONG.

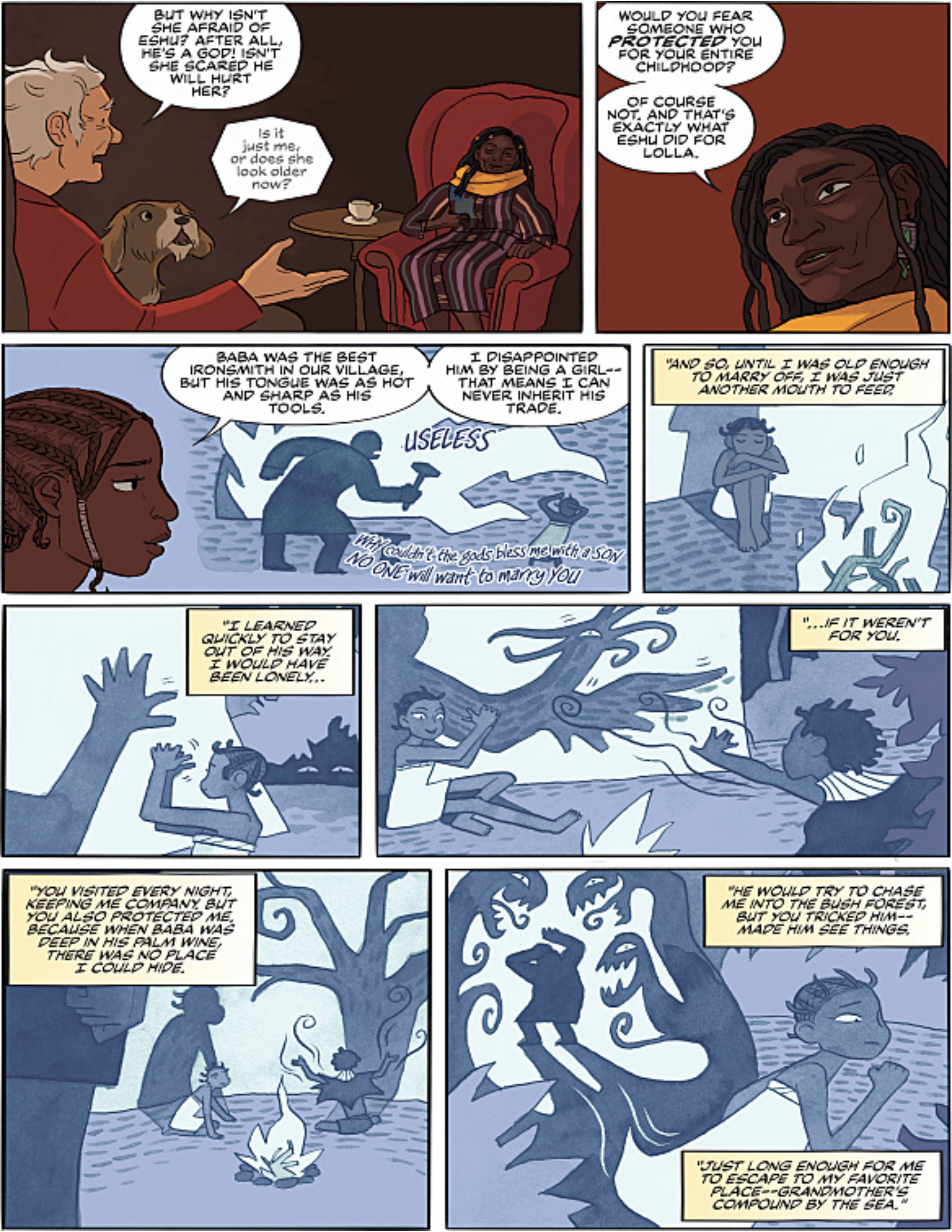
WHAT IS A GOD?
SINGER, YOU WILL TELL US!
YES! NOW HEAR OF A NEW GOD--ESHU, COMMANDER OF WINDS AND FATE, TOPPLER OF KINGS, MASTER OF EVERY TONGUE, AND SOLE CONVEYOR OF SACRIFICES BETWEEN HEAVEN AND EARTH.
HAIL ESHU, GOD OF CHANGE! GOD OF CUNNING AND CHAOS. HE SHUNS CONSTANCY, AND IS SLAVE TO NOTHING.
NOT EVEN HIS OWN NATURE.

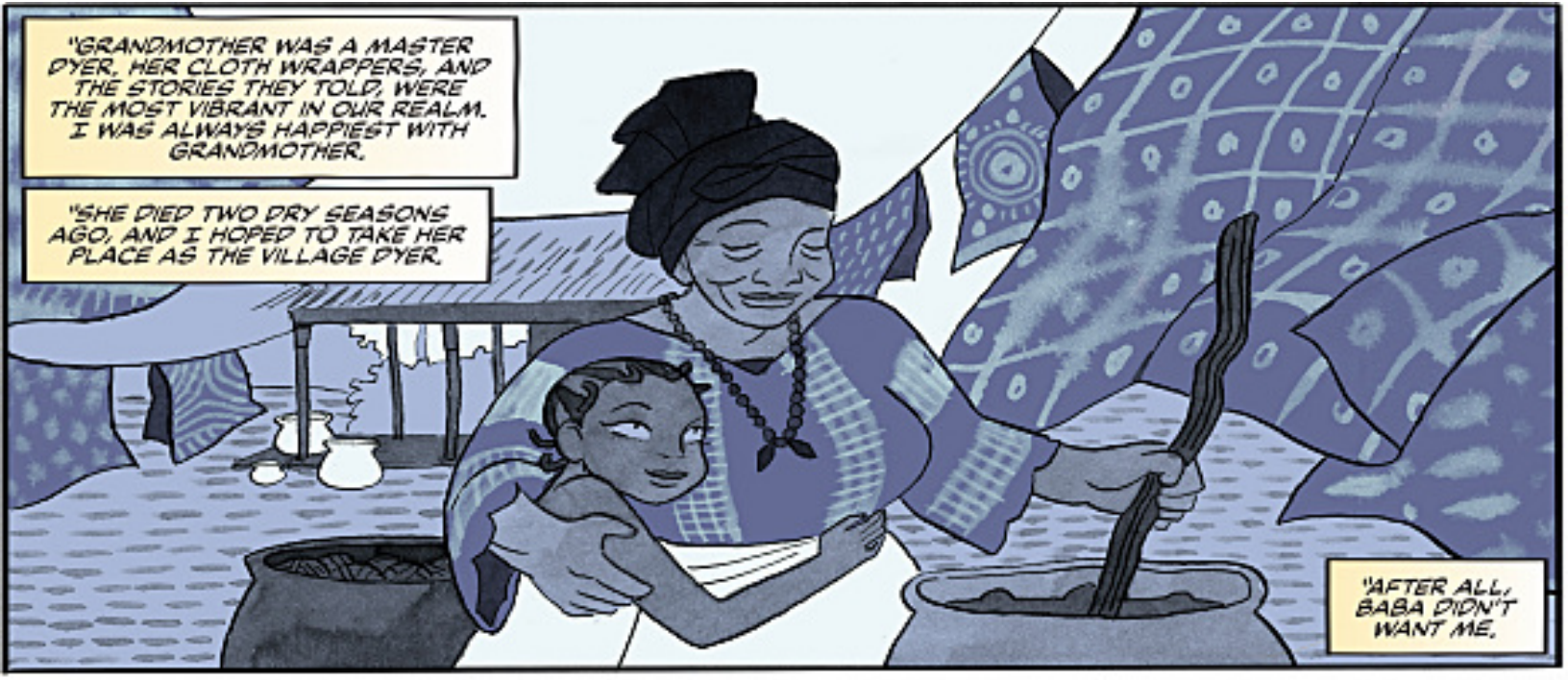
ESHU'S DEVOTEES ARE FEW, FOR HUMANS FEAR HIM, AND HE RARELY CLAIMS MORTALS WITH HIS MARK. HIS WORSHIPPERS, OFTEN GREEDY KINGS AND MERCHANT LORDS, OFFEND HIM WITH THEIR PREDICTABILITY.
OH GREAT ESHU! CONFUSE THE RANKS OF MY ENEMIES, THAT WE MAY SLAUGHTER THEM IN BATTLE!
MOST ESTEEMED ESHU, TURN THE ROADS TO MUCK, SO MY RIVALS ARE HOMEBOUND, AND WILL NOT THREATEN MY SALES AT THE MARKET!
WHEN ESHU DOES REPLY, HE OFTEN DOES PRECISELY THE OPPOSITE OF WHAT HE IS ASKED...HE IS A GOD OF TRICKS, AFTER ALL. BUT EVEN MISCHIEF IS A FORM OF CONSTANCY, AND SO JUST AS OFTEN, HE IS FAITHFUL...FOR CHANGE IS WHO HE IS.
NO MATTER HOW LONELY IT MAKES HIM.

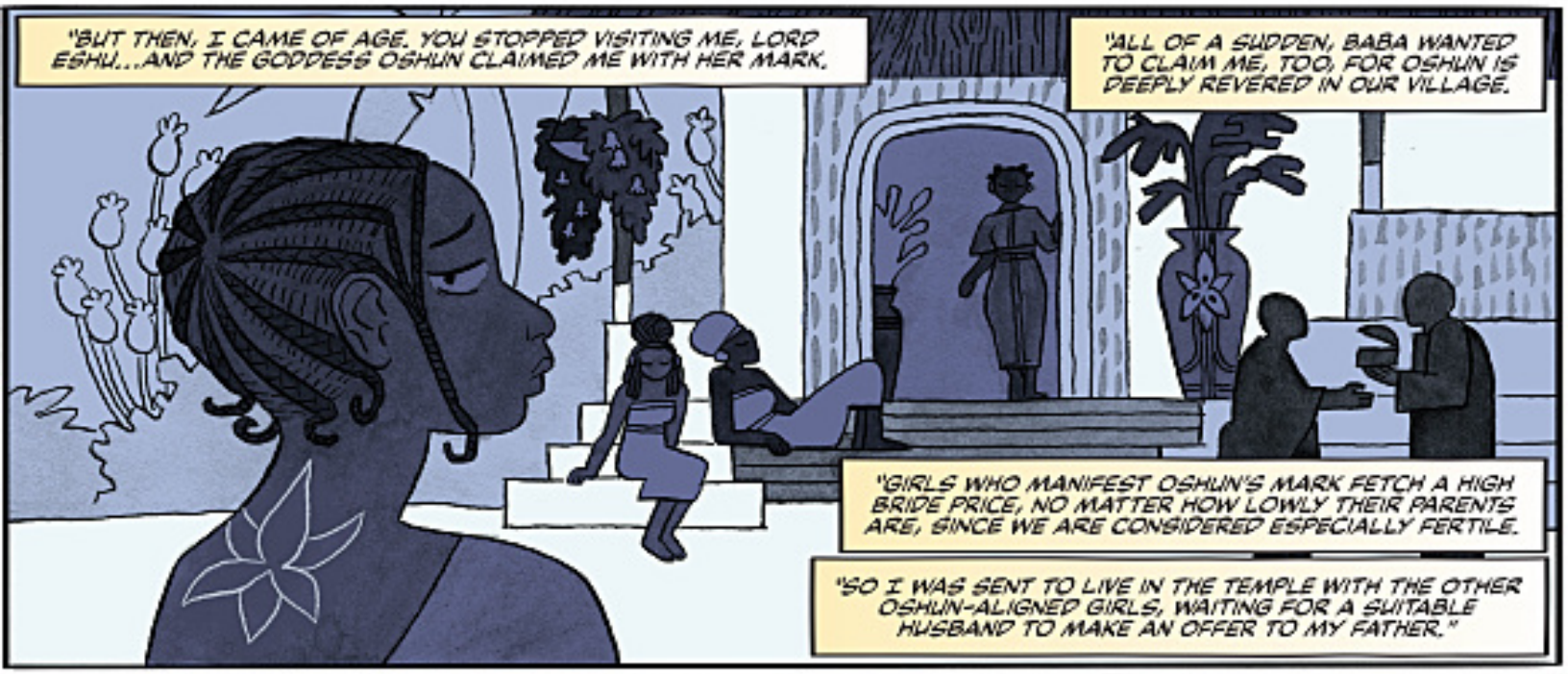
HEAR ME, ESHU! PLEASE ACCEPT MY SACRIFICE...
ANOTHER PRAYER... -*SIGH*- WHAT WILL IT BE THIS TIME? A KING OFFERING GOLD? A WARLORD OFFERING THE HEADS OF HIS ENEMIES?
BUT TO ESHU'S SURPRISE, THE PRAYER COMES FROM A YOUNG WOMAN--BARELY MORE THAN A GIRL, BEFORE A MAKESHIFT ALTAR.
INTRIGUED, ESHU DOES SOMETHING HE HASN'T DONE IN AGES...

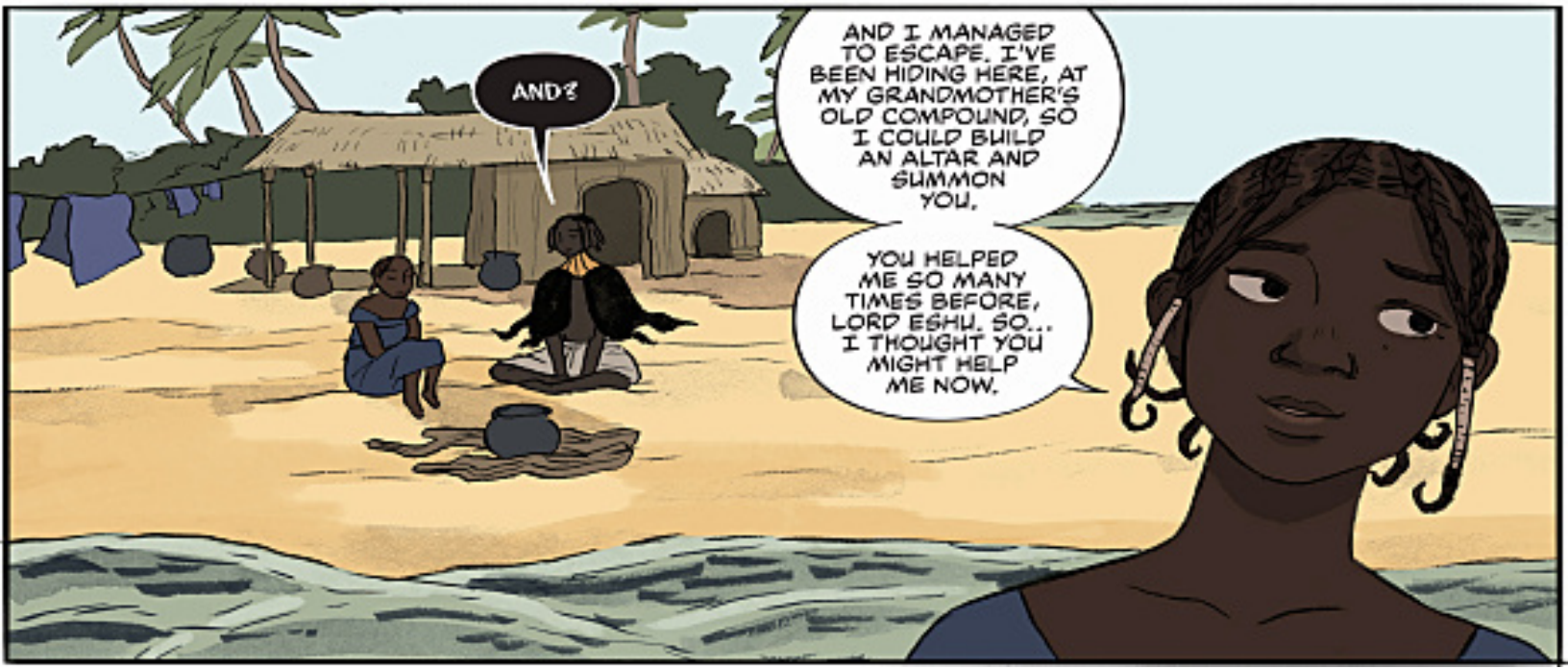

...HE APPEARS BEFORE HER, IN ALL HIS GLORY.
I, THE GREAT GOD ESHU, WILL HEAR YOUR REQUEST...
...HUMBLE AS YOUR OFFERING IS. I HAVE NEVER RECEIVED A VESSEL OF INDIGO DYE.
THAT'S BECAUSE IT'S THE HARDEST KIND TO MAKE.
WELL? HAVE YOU NO REQUEST? WHY DON'T YOU SPEAK?
OH. SORRY. IT'S JUST-- YOU'RE BIGGER THAN YOU USED TO BE.
DO YOU PRESUME TO KNOW A GOD?
DON'T YOU REMEMBER ME? I'M OYINLOLLA-- THE GIRL YOU USED TO PLAY WITH. LOLLA FOR SHORT.
USED TO...AH. WELL, IF YOU SPEAK THE TRUTH, I WOULD HARDLY REMEMBER YOU. WE MUST HAVE MET IN MY PREVIOUS LIFE-CYCLE.
CYCLE?
GODS DO NOT AGE AS MORTALS DO. TO US, TIME IS A CIRCLE--WE CYCLE CONSTANTLY BETWEEN YOUTH, PRIME, AND OLD AGE. EVERY STAGE, YOUNG OR OLD, IS LIKE BEING BORN ANEW.
OH, BUT... IF YOU DON'T REMEMBER ANYTHING THAT HAPPENED IN YOUR LAST STAGE, HOW DO YOU KNOW WHO YOU ARE?


WHO I AM? WHO I AM? I AM ESHU, COMMANDER OF FATE. THEY SING OF ME IN TEMPLES AND FESTIVAL SQUARES! GRIOTS SPIN TALES OF MY EXPLOITS FROM DAWN TO DUSK!
I NEED NOT "REMEMBER" A GIRL FROM ONE OF MY MILLENNIA OF CYCLES TO KNOW WHO I AM.
BUT WE DID MEET. YOU USED TO PLAY WITH ME ALL THE TIME! CAN'T YOU REMEMBER ANYTHING?
NO. AND YES. WHEN MORTALS TELL STORIES OF THE GODS, THEY MANIFEST IN THE CIRCLE OF TIME. THEY BECOME TRUE, WHETHER THEY HAPPENED OR NOT.
I HAVE LIVED COUNTLESS LIVES, AND ANSWERED MANY PRAYERS, THOUGH THE MORTALS WHO WILL PRAY THEM ARE NOT YET BORN.
THAT'S AN AWFULLY FANCY WAY OF SAYING YOU HAVE AMNESIA.
I GROW TIRED OF YOUR IMPUDENCE! YOU HAVE INSULTED ME FOR THE LAST TIME. WE WILL SEE HOW LONG YOU DOUBT MY MIGHT--
THEN YOU'RE AN IMPOSTER.
WHAT DID YOU SAY?
YOU CAN'T BE ESHU! ESHU IS THE GOD OF CHANGE-- OF UNPREDICTABILITY. BUT NOW YOU'RE GOING TO CURSE ME FOR OFFENDING YOU...JUST LIKE EVERY OTHER GOD, AREN'T YOU?
...ARE YOU TRYING TO MANIPULATE ME?
I DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU MEAN. I'M JUST A SILLY MORTAL.
...HOW ABOUT I TELL YOU THE STORY OF HOW WE MET?

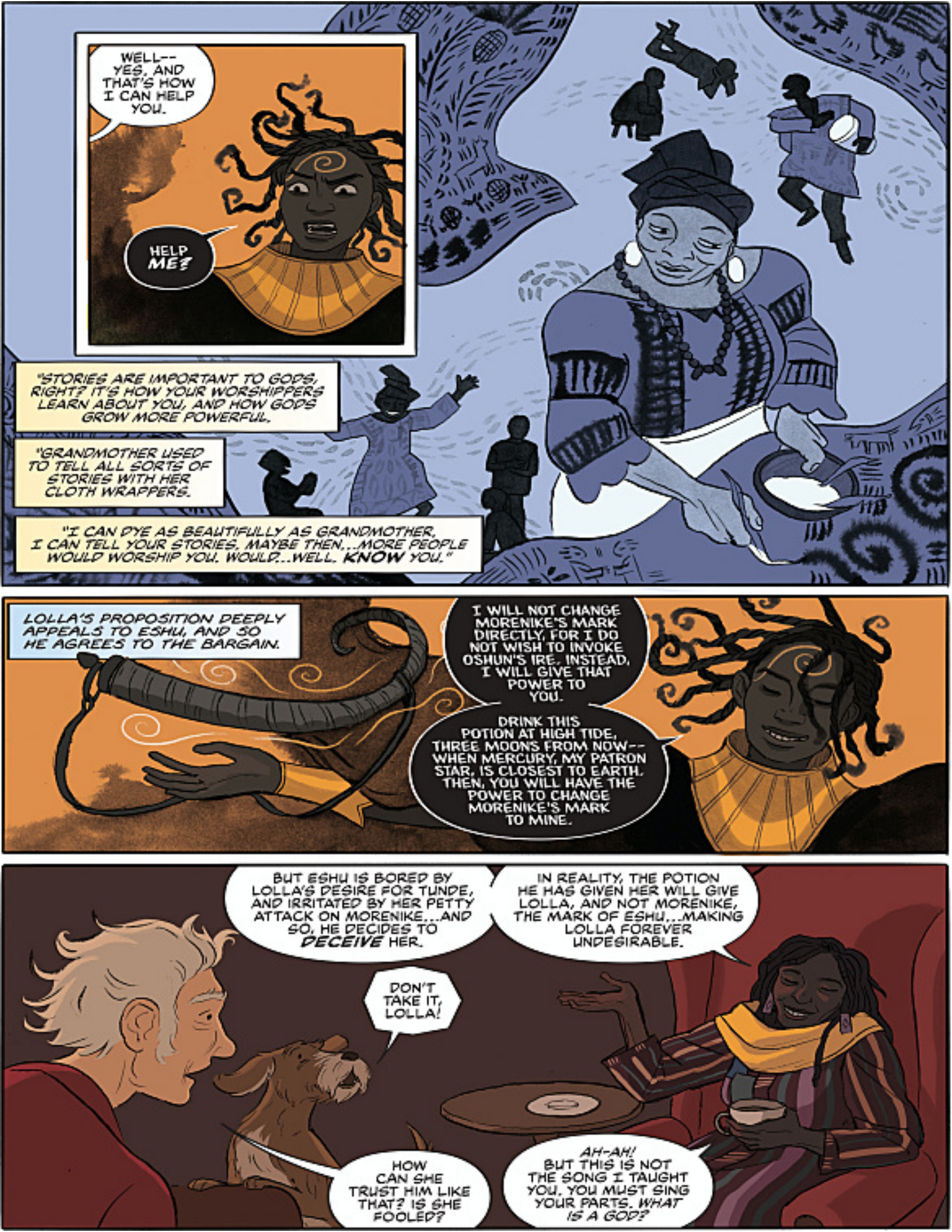

BUT WHY ISN'T SHE AFRAID OF ESHU? AFTER ALL, HE'S A GOD! ISN'T SHE SCARED HE WILL HURT HER?
Is it just me, or does she look older now?
WOULD YOU FEAR SOMEONE WHO PROTECTED YOU FOR YOUR ENTIRE CHILDHOOD?
OF COURSE NOT. AND THAT'S EXACTLY WHAT ESHU DID FOR LOLLA.
BABA WAS THE BEST IRONSMITH IN OUR VILLAGE, BUT HIS TONGUE WAS AS HOT AND SHARP AS HIS TOOLS.
I DISAPPOINTED HIM BY BEING A GIRL-- THAT MEANS I CAN NEVER INHERIT HIS TRADE.
USELESS
Why couldn't the gods bless me with a SON
NO ONE will want to marry YOU
"AND SO, UNTIL I WAS OLD ENOUGH TO MARRY OFF, I WAS JUST ANOTHER MOUTH TO FEED.
"I LEARNED QUICKLY TO STAY OUT OF HIS WAY. I WOULD HAVE BEEN LONELY...
"...IF IT WEREN'T FOR YOU.
"YOU VISITED EVERY NIGHT, KEEPING ME COMPANY BUT YOU ALSO PROTECTED ME, BECAUSE WHEN BABA WAS DEEP IN HIS PALM WINE, THERE WAS NO PLACE I COULD HIDE.
"HE WOULD TRY TO CHASE ME INTO THE BUSH FOREST, BUT YOU TRICKED HIM-- MADE HIM SEE THINGS.
"JUST LONG ENOUGH FOR ME TO ESCAPE TO MY FAVORITE PLACE--GRANDMOTHER'S COMPOUND BY THE SEA."

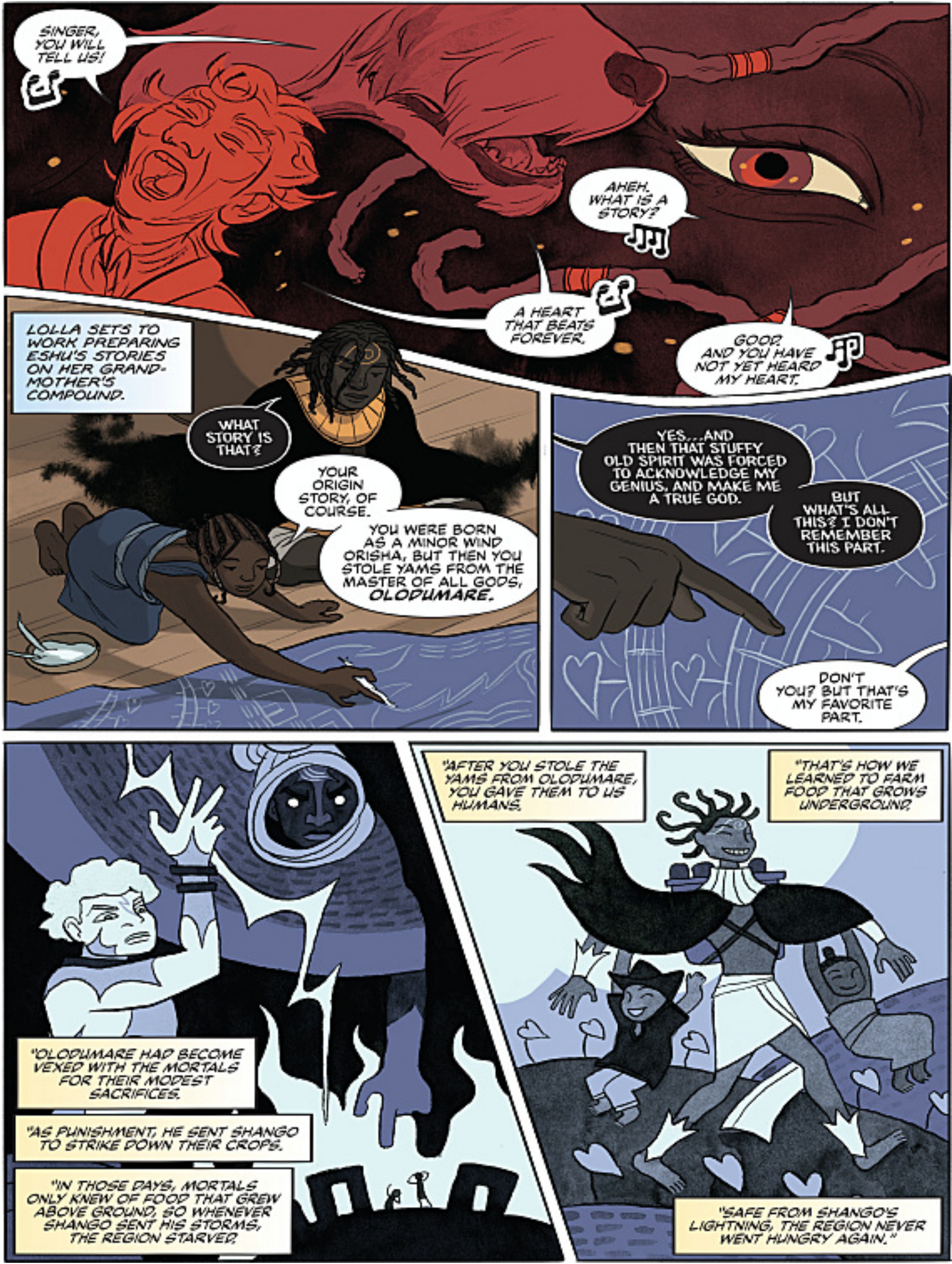

"GRANDMOTHER WAS A MASTER DYER. HER CLOTH WRAPPERS, AND THE STORIES THEY TOLD, WERE THE MOST VIBRANT IN OUR REALM. I WAS ALWAYS HAPPIEST WITH GRANDMOTHER.
"SHE DIED TWO DRY SEASONS AGO, AND I HOPED TO TAKE HER PLACE AS THE VILLAGE DYER.
"AFTER ALL, BABA DIDN'T WANT ME.

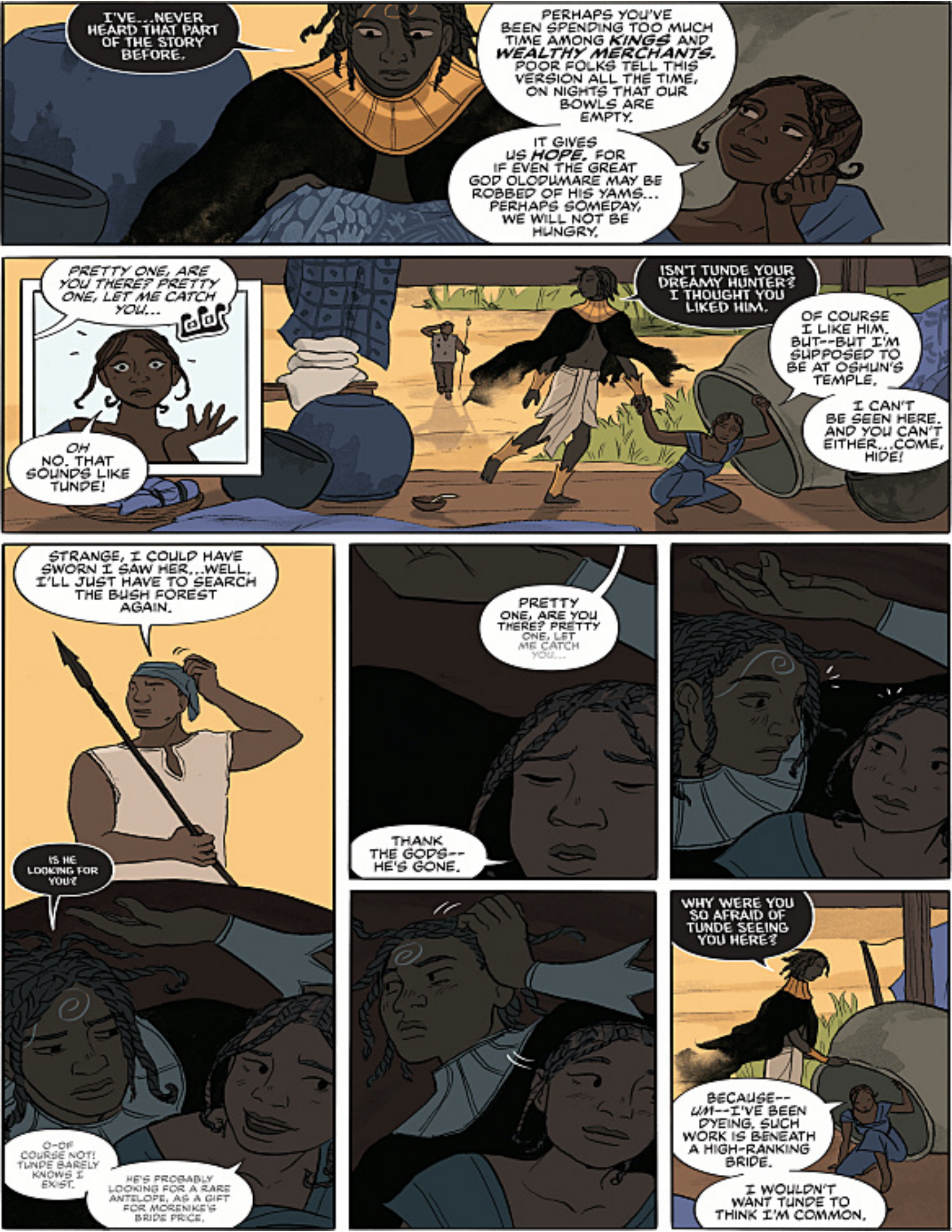

"BUT THEN, I CAME OF AGE. YOU STOPPED VISITING ME, LORD ESHU...AND THE GODDESS OSHUN CLAIMED ME WITH HER MARK.
"ALL OF A SUDDEN, BABA WANTED TO CLAIM ME, TOO, FOR OSHUN IS DEEPLY REVERED IN OUR VILLAGE.
"GIRLS WHO MANIFEST OSHUN'S MARK FETCH A HIGH BRIDE PRICE, NO MATTER HOW LOWLY THEIR PARENTS ARE, SINCE WE ARE CONSIDERED ESPECIALLY FERTILE.
"SO I WAS SENT TO LIVE IN THE TEMPLE WITH THE OTHER OSHUN-ALIGNED GIRLS, WAITING FOR A SUITABLE HUSBAND TO MAKE AN OFFER TO MY FATHER."

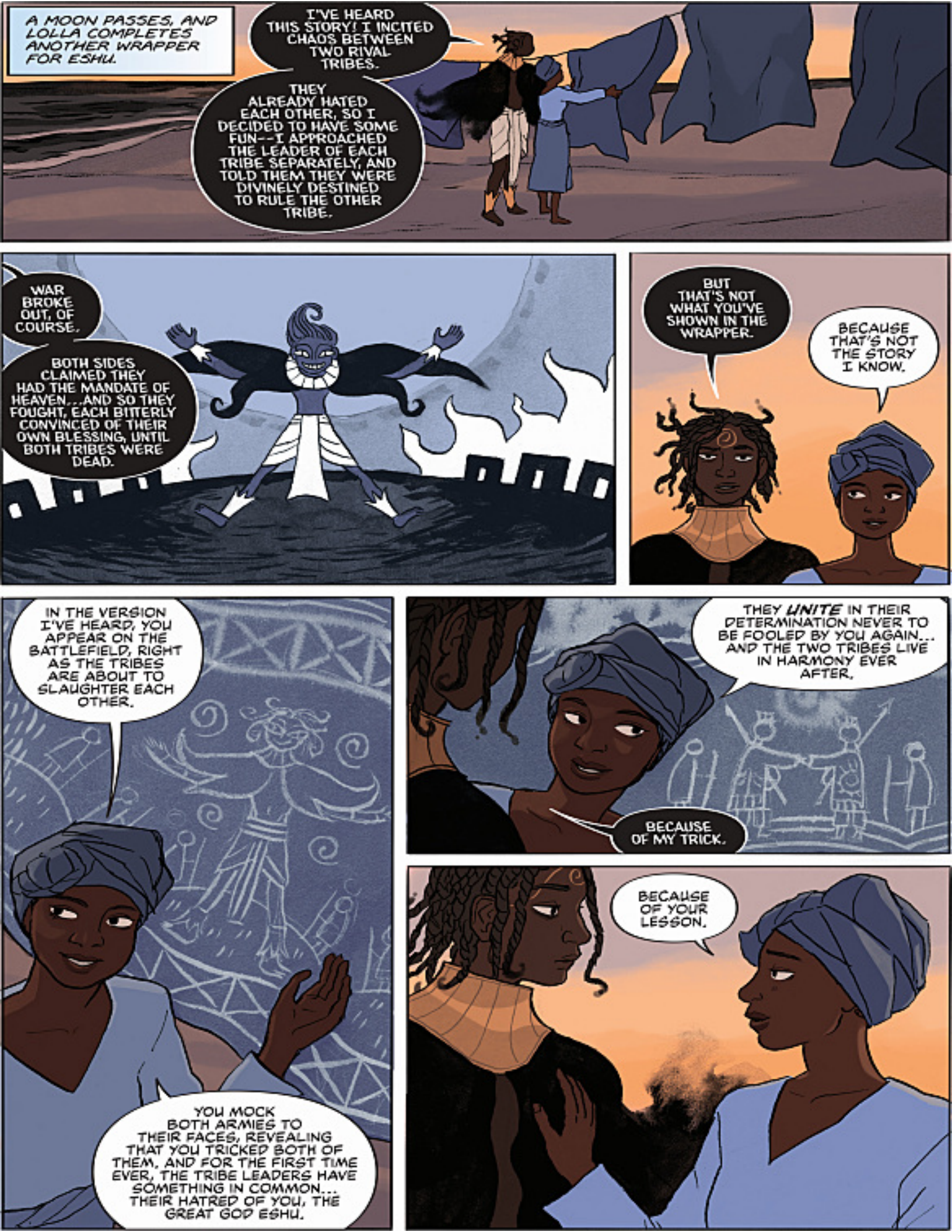

AND?
AND I MANAGED TO ESCAPE. I'VE BEEN HIDING HERE, AT MY GRANDMOTHER'S OLD COMPOUND, SO I COULD BUILD AN ALTAR AND SUMMON YOU.
YOU HELPED ME SO MANY TIMES BEFORE, LORD ESHU. SO... I THOUGHT YOU MIGHT HELP ME NOW.

NOW THAT YOU'VE TOLD THE STORY... I KNOW IT. I KNOW YOU.
HE REMEMBERS THAT SHE MADE HIM FEEL LESS ALONE.
BUT WHY DID YOU RUN FROM OSHUN'S TEMPLE? MOST MORTAL GIRLS WOULD CONSIDER THEMSELVES LUCKY TO BE IN YOUR POSITION.
DON'T YOU WANT TO MARRY A WEALTHY VILLAGE BOY?
OF COURSE. THAT'S WHAT ALL GIRLS WANT, RIGHT? BUT I DON'T JUST WANT ANY WEALTHY MAN. I WANT THE BEST ONE...
"TUNDE THE OKO-ALIGNED! HE'S PERFECT...STRONG, HANDSOME, JUST DREAMY. BUT HE'S PROMISED TO SOMEONE ELSE. ANOTHER OSHUN-ALIGNED GIRL NAMED...MORENIKE. YES. THAT'S IT.
"SWEET, PRETTY MORENIKE. SHE'S GOING TO BE HIS FIRST WIFE. I CAN STILL MARRY TUNDE AFTER HER, OF COURSE, BUT THEN I'D ONLY BE HIS JUNIOR WIFE--SHE WOULD ALWAYS COME FIRST."
AND HERE I WAS, THINKING YOU'D ASK FOR SOMETHING SPECIAL. I SHOULDN'T HAVE HOPED--YOU'RE JUST AS INSIPID AS ANY OTHER MORTAL.
LET ME GUESS...YOU WANT ME TO MAKE TUNDE FALL IN LOVE WITH YOU?
NO... I WOULDN'T WANT HIS FEELINGS TO BE FORCED. I JUST NEED HELP GETTING MORENIKE OUT OF THE WAY.
I WANT YOU TO TAKE AWAY MORENIKE'S MARK...AND GIVE HER YOURS INSTEAD. TUNDE WILL NEVER MARRY HER THEN, BECAUSE--WELL--
BECAUSE I AM THE MOST FEARED AND REVILED OF ALL THE GODS? BECAUSE MORTALS ONLY WORSHIP ME TO ENSURE THAT THEIR OFFERINGS TO OTHER GODS REACH THE HEAVENS SAFELY?

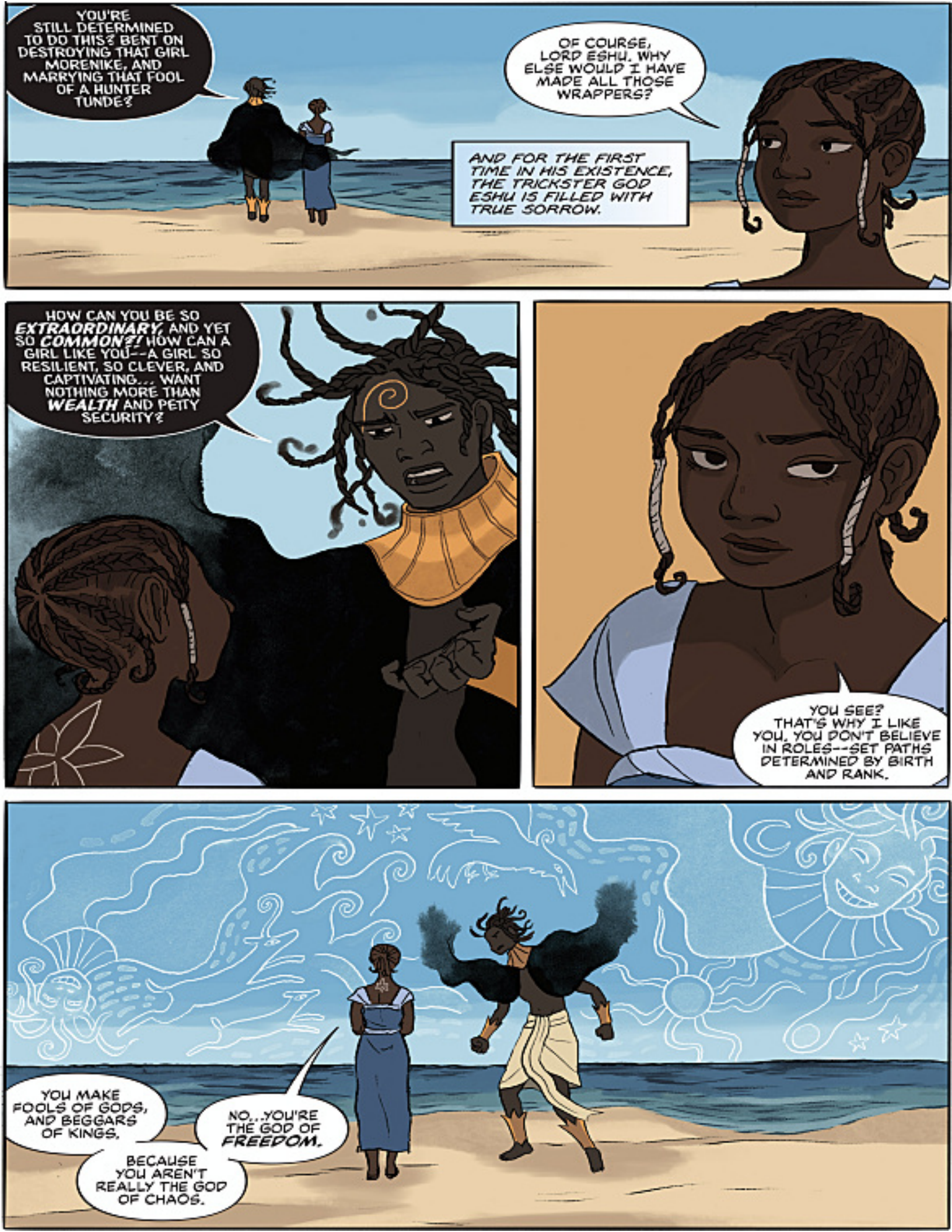

WELL-- YES, AND THAT'S HOW I CAN HELP YOU.
HELP ME?
"STORIES ARE IMPORTANT TO GODS, RIGHT? IT'S HOW YOUR WORSHIPPERS LEARN ABOUT YOU, AND HOW GODS GROW MORE POWERFUL.
"GRANDMOTHER USED TO TELL ALL SORTS OF STORIES WITH HER CLOTH WRAPPERS.
"I CAN DYE AS BEAUTIFULLY AS GRANDMOTHER, I CAN TELL YOUR STORIES. MAYBE THEN...MORE PEOPLE WOULD WORSHIP YOU. WOULD...WELL. KNOW YOU."
LOLLA'S PROPOSITION DEEPLY APPEALS TO ESHU, AND SO HE AGREES TO THE BARGAIN.
I WILL NOT CHANGE MORENIKE'S MARK DIRECTLY, FOR I DO NOT WISH TO INVOKE OSHUN'S IRE. INSTEAD, I WILL GIVE THAT POWER TO YOU.
DRINK THIS POTION AT HIGH TIDE, THREE MOONS FROM NOW-- WHEN MERCURY, MY PATRON STAR, IS CLOSEST TO EARTH. THEN, YOU WILL HAVE THE POWER TO CHANGE MORENIKE'S MARK TO MINE.
BUT ESHU IS BORED BY LOLLA'S DESIRE FOR TUNDE, AND IRRITATED BY HER PETTY ATTACK ON MORENIKE...AND SO, HE DECIDES TO DECEIVE HER.
IN REALITY, THE POTION HE HAS GIVEN HER WILL GIVE LOLLA, AND NOT MORENIKE, THE MARK OF ESHU...MAKING LOLLA FOREVER UNDESIRABLE.
DON'T TAKE IT, LOLLA!
HOW CAN SHE TRUST HIM LIKE THAT? IS SHE FOOLED?
AH-AH! BUT THIS IS NOT THE SONG I TAUGHT YOU. YOU MUST SING YOUR PARTS. WHAT IS A GOD?

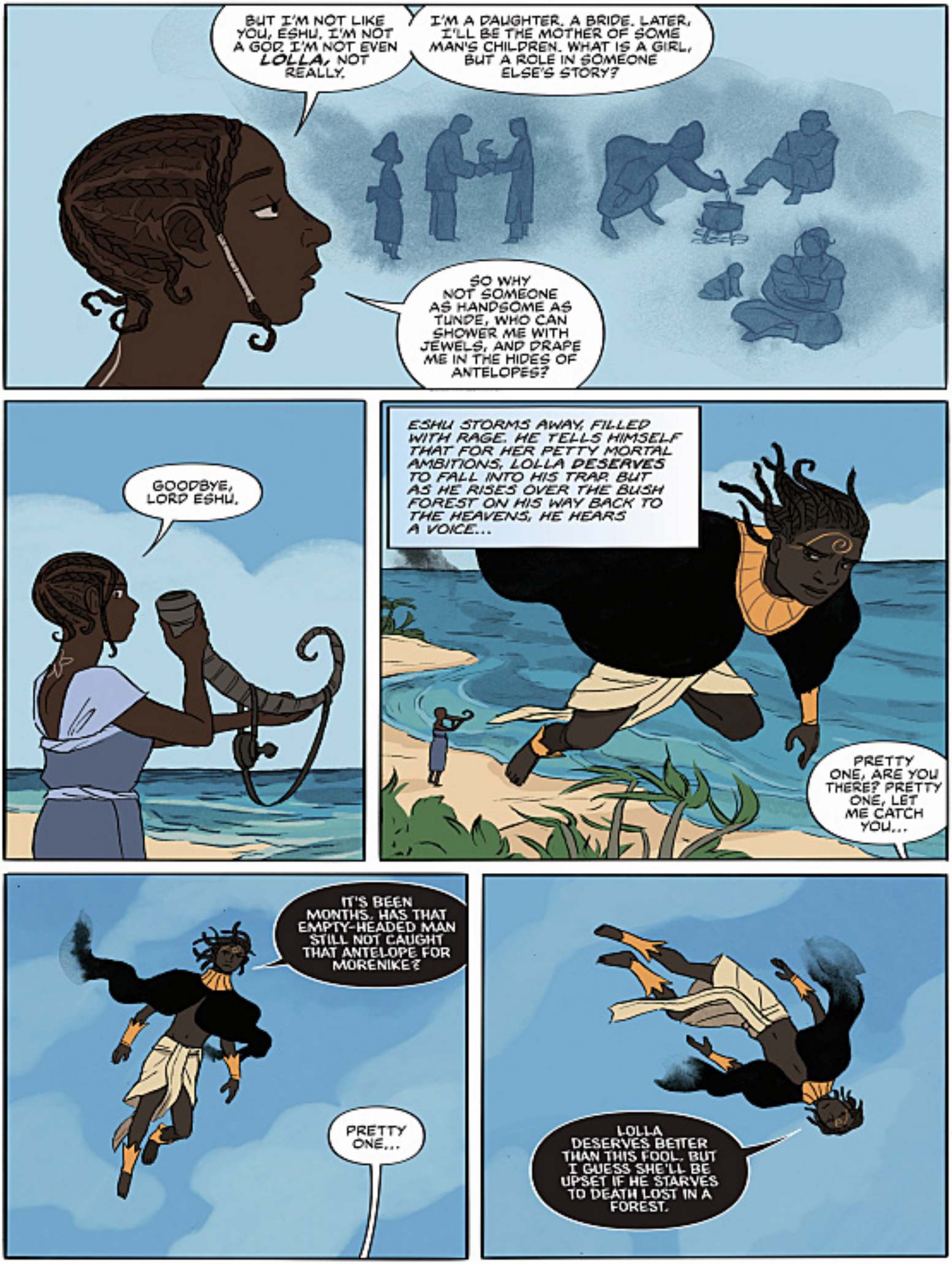

SINGER, YOU WILL TELL US!
AHEH. WHAT IS A STORY?
A HEART THAT BEATS FOREVER.
GOOD. AND YOU HAVE NOT YET HEARD MY HEART.
LOLLA SETS TO WORK PREPARING ESHU'S STORIES ON HER GRANDMOTHER'S COMPOUND.
WHAT STORY IS THAT?
YOUR ORIGIN STORY, OF COURSE.
YOU WERE BORN AS A MINOR WIND ORISHA, BUT THEN YOU STOLE YAMS FROM THE MASTER OF ALL GODS, OLODUMARE.
YES...AND THEN THAT STUFFY OLD SPIRIT WAS FORCED TO ACKNOWLEDGE MY GENIUS, AND MAKE ME A TRUE GOD.
BUT WHAT'S ALL THIS? I DON'T REMEMBER THIS PART.
DON'T YOU? BUT THAT'S MY FAVORITE PART.
"OLODUMARE HAD BECOME VEXED WITH THE MORTALS FOR THEIR MODEST SACRIFICES.
"AS PUNISHMENT, HE SENT SHANGO TO STRIKE DOWN THEIR CROPS.
"IN THOSE DAYS, MORTALS ONLY KNEW OF FOOD THAT GREW ABOVE GROUND, SO WHENEVER SHANGO SENT HIS STORMS, THE REGION STARVED.
"AFTER YOU STOLE THE YAMS FROM OLODUMARE, YOU GAVE THEM TO US HUMANS.
"THAT'S HOW WE LEARNED TO FARM FOOD THAT GROWS UNDERGROUND.
"SAFE FROM SHANGO'S LIGHTNING, THE REGION NEVER WENT HUNGRY AGAIN."


I'VE...NEVER HEARD THAT PART OF THE STORY BEFORE.
PERHAPS YOU'VE BEEN SPENDING TOO MUCH TIME AMONG KINGS AND WEALTHY MERCHANTS. POOR FOLKS TELL THIS VERSION ALL THE TIME, ON NIGHTS THAT OUR BOWLS ARE EMPTY.
IT GIVES US HOPE. FOR IF EVEN THE GREAT GOD OLODUMARE MAY BE ROBBED OF HIS YAMS... PERHAPS SOMEDAY, WE WILL NOT BE HUNGRY.
PRETTY ONE, ARE YOU THERE? PRETTY ONE, LET ME CATCH YOU...
OH NO. THAT SOUNDS LIKE TUNDE!
ISN'T TUNDE YOUR DREAMY HUNTER? I THOUGHT YOU LIKED HIM.
OF COURSE I LIKE HIM. BUT--BUT I'M SUPPOSED TO BE AT OSHUN'S TEMPLE.
I CAN'T BE SEEN HERE. AND YOU CAN'T EITHER...COME, HIDE!
STRANGE, I COULD HAVE SWORN I SAW HER...WELL, I'LL JUST HAVE TO SEARCH THE BUSH FOREST AGAIN.
IS HE LOOKING FOR YOU?
O-OF COURSE NOT! TUNDE BARELY KNOWS I EXIST.
HE'S PROBABLY LOOKING FOR A RARE ANTELOPE, AS A GIFT FOR MORENIKE'S BRIDE PRICE.
PRETTY ONE, ARE YOU THERE? PRETTY ONE, LET ME CATCH YOU...
THANK THE GODS-- HE'S GONE.
WHY WERE YOU SO AFRAID OF TUNDE SEEING YOU HERE?
BECAUSE-- UM--I'VE BEEN DYEING. SUCH WORK IS BENEATH A HIGH-RANKING BRIDE.
I WOULDN'T WANT TUNDE TO THINK I'M COMMON.

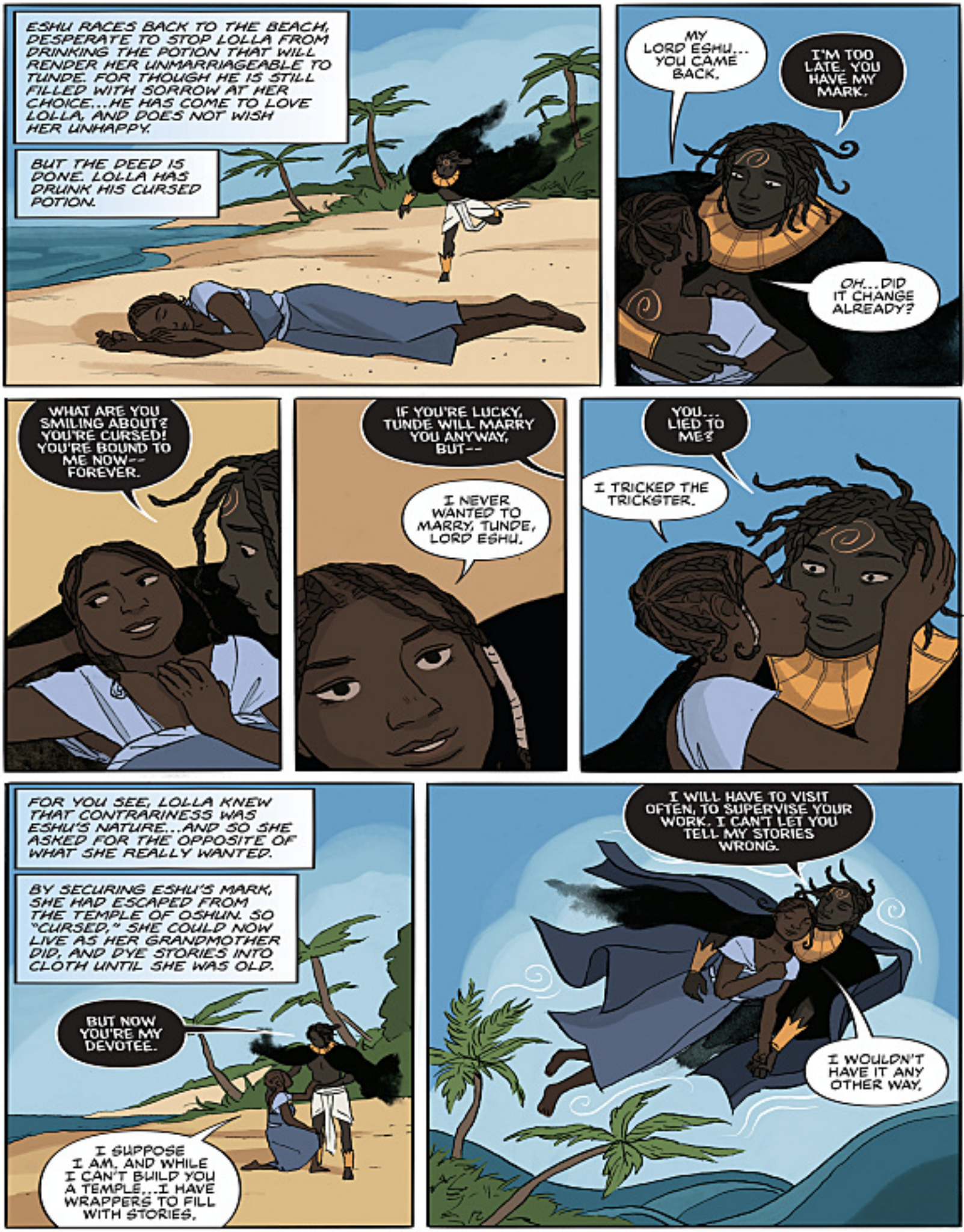

A MOON PASSES, AND LOLLA COMPLETES ANOTHER WRAPPER FOR ESHU.
I'VE HEARD THIS STORY! I INCITED CHAOS BETWEEN TWO RIVAL TRIBES.
THEY ALREADY HATED EACH OTHER, SO I DECIDED TO HAVE SOME FUN--I APPROACHED THE LEADER OF EACH TRIBE SEPARATELY, AND TOLD THEM THEY WERE DIVINELY DESTINED TO RULE THE OTHER TRIBE.
WAR BROKE OUT, OF COURSE.
BOTH SIDES CLAIMED THEY HAD THE MANDATE OF HEAVEN...AND SO THEY FOUGHT, EACH BITTERLY CONVINCED OF THEIR OWN BLESSING, UNTIL BOTH TRIBES WERE DEAD.
BUT THAT'S NOT WHAT YOU'VE SHOWN IN THE WRAPPER.
BECAUSE THAT'S NOT THE STORY I KNOW.
IN THE VERSION I'VE HEARD, YOU APPEAR ON THE BATTLEFIELD, RIGHT AS THE TRIBES ARE ABOUT TO SLAUGHTER EACH OTHER.
YOU MOCK BOTH ARMIES TO THEIR FACES, REVEALING THAT YOU TRICKED BOTH OF THEM, AND FOR THE FIRST TIME EVER, THE TRIBE LEADERS HAVE SOMETHING IN COMMON... THEIR HATRED OF YOU, THE GREAT GOD ESHU.
THEY *UNITE* IN THEIR DETERMINATION NEVER TO BE FOOLED BY YOU AGAIN... AND THE TWO TRIBES LIVE IN HARMONY EVER AFTER.
BECAUSE OF MY TRICK.
BECAUSE OF YOUR LESSON.

ONE MOON PASSES. THEN TWO...THREE.
THE GIRL AND THE GOD DELIGHTED IN EACH OTHER'S COMPANY. BUT SOON, THE MORNING WOULD COME WHEN MERCURY WAS CLOSEST TO EARTH.
LOLLA FINISHED HER LAST WRAPPER FOR ESHU, AND VISITED THE SHORE AT HIGH TIDE TO DRINK ESHU'S POTION.


YOU'RE STILL DETERMINED TO DO THIS? BENT ON DESTROYING THAT GIRL MORENIKE, AND MARRYING THAT FOOL OF A HUNTER TUNDE?
OF COURSE, LORD ESHU. WHY ELSE WOULD I HAVE MADE ALL THOSE WRAPPERS?
AND FOR THE FIRST TIME IN HIS EXISTENCE, THE TRICKSTER GOD ESHU IS FILLED WITH TRUE SORROW.
HOW CAN YOU BE SO EXTRAORDINARY, AND YET SO COMMON?! HOW CAN A GIRL LIKE YOU--A GIRL SO RESILIENT, SO CLEVER, AND CAPTIVATING... WANT NOTHING MORE THAN WEALTH AND PETTY SECURITY?
YOU SEE? THAT'S WHY I LIKE YOU. YOU DON'T BELIEVE IN ROLES--SET PATHS DETERMINED BY BIRTH AND RANK.
YOU MAKE FOOLS OF GODS, AND BEGGARS OF KINGS.
NO...YOU'RE THE GOD OF FREEDOM.
BECAUSE YOU AREN'T REALLY THE GOD OF CHAOS.


BUT I'M NOT LIKE YOU, ESHU. I'M NOT A GOD. I'M NOT EVEN LOLLA, NOT REALLY.
I'M A DAUGHTER. A BRIDE. LATER, I'LL BE THE MOTHER OF SOME MAN'S CHILDREN. WHAT IS A GIRL, BUT A ROLE IN SOMEONE ELSE'S STORY?
SO WHY NOT SOMEONE AS HANDSOME AS TUNDE, WHO CAN SHOWER ME WITH JEWELS, AND DRAPE ME IN THE HIDES OF ANTELOPES?
GOODBYE, LORD ESHU.
ESHU STORMS AWAY, FILLED WITH RAGE. HE TELLS HIMSELF THAT FOR HER PETTY MORTAL AMBITIONS, LOLLA DESERVES TO FALL INTO HIS TRAP. BUT AS HE RISES OVER THE BUSH FOREST ON HIS WAY BACK TO THE HEAVENS, HE HEARS A VOICE...
PRETTY ONE, ARE YOU THERE? PRETTY ONE, LET ME CATCH YOU...
IT'S BEEN MONTHS. HAS THAT EMPTY-HEADED MAN STILL NOT CAUGHT THAT ANTELOPE FOR MORENIKE?
PRETTY ONE...
LOLLA DESERVES BETTER THAN THIS FOOL. BUT I GUESS SHE'LL BE UPSET IF HE STARVES TO DEATH LOST IN A FOREST.

A GOD!
TOWN IS THAT WAY, MORTAL. ISN'T IT TIME YOU GAVE UP ON THIS FRUITLESS HUNT?
FORGIVE ME, DIVINE LORD. BUT I WILL NEVER STOP SEARCHING FOR MY LOVE.
THAT SET ON THIS MORENIKE GIRL, ARE YOU?
MORENIKE? NEVER HEARD OF HER.
WHAT? THEN WHAT IN THE GODS' NAME ARE YOU LOOKING FOR?
NOT A WHAT, A WHO-- OYINLOLLA, BELLE OF THE OSHUN-ALIGNED.
SHE DISAPPEARED FROM THE TEMPLE MONTHS AGO, BUT I'M DETERMINED TO HAVE ONLY HER FOR A BRIDE.
I'VE BEEN SEARCHING FOR MONTHS!
SHE DOESN'T KNOW TUNDE WANTS HER...
SHE'S ABOUT TO MAKE A TERRIBLE MISTAKE!


ESHU RACES BACK TO THE BEACH, DESPERATE TO STOP LOLLA FROM DRINKING THE POTION THAT WILL RENDER HER UNMARRIAGEABLE TO TUNDE. FOR THOUGH HE IS STILL FILLED WITH SORROW AT HER CHOICE...HE HAS COME TO LOVE LOLLA, AND DOES NOT WISH HER UNHAPPY.
BUT THE DEED IS DONE. LOLLA HAS DRUNK HIS CURSED POTION.
MY LORD ESHU... YOU CAME BACK.
I'M TOO LATE. YOU HAVE MY MARK.
OH...DID IT CHANGE ALREADY?
WHAT ARE YOU SMILING ABOUT? YOU'RE CURSED! YOU'RE BOUND TO ME NOW-- FOREVER.
IF YOU'RE LUCKY, TUNDE WILL MARRY YOU ANYWAY, BUT--
I NEVER WANTED TO MARRY, TUNDE, LORD ESHU.
YOU... LIED TO ME?
I TRICKED THE TRICKSTER.
FOR YOU SEE, LOLLA KNEW THAT CONTRARINESS WAS ESHU'S NATURE...AND SO SHE ASKED FOR THE OPPOSITE OF WHAT SHE REALLY WANTED.
BY SECURING ESHU'S MARK, SHE HAD ESCAPED FROM THE TEMPLE OF OSHUN. SO "CURSED," SHE COULD NOW LIVE AS HER GRANDMOTHER DID, AND DYE STORIES INTO CLOTH UNTIL SHE WAS OLD.
BUT NOW YOU'RE MY DEVOTEE.
I SUPPOSE I AM. AND WHILE I CAN'T BUILD YOU A TEMPLE...I HAVE WRAPPERS TO FILL WITH STORIES.
I WILL HAVE TO VISIT OFTEN, TO SUPERVISE YOUR WORK. I CAN'T LET YOU TELL MY STORIES WRONG.
I WOULDN'T HAVE IT ANY OTHER WAY.

FOR THE REST OF LOLLA'S DAYS, ESHU AND LOLLA DYED WRAPPERS IN BLISSFUL SOLITUDE, AND HER FAME AS AN ARTISAN SPREAD THROUGHOUT THE REALM.
AND WHEN ESHU GREW OLD, PASSING INTO HIS NEXT CYCLE AND FORGETTING HIS PAST LIFE...LOLLA DYED A NEW WRAPPER, TO ENSURE HE WOULD REMEMBER THE STORY SHE LOVED BEST--THEIR OWN.
AND NOW, YOU HAVE HEARD MY HEART.
WELL, WOULD YOU LOOK AT THAT-- THAT STORM'S PASSED! I SUPPOSE I'LL BE ON MY WAY.
ARE YOU SURE YOU DON'T NEED MORE REST? THAT WAS A RIVETING STORY, BUT...YOU LOOK DIFFERENT.
I'M GLAD YOU ENJOYED MY STORY. DO HOLD ONTO IT.
I MIGHT ASK FOR IT BACK SOMEDAY.
THE END.

TALE THREE VARIANT COVER

DANI PENDERGAST

A Tale of Two Markets

When I was very little and living in Lebanon, I read a story about a wily fox tricking a whole village into buying an old pumpkin he'd found on the road. He told the village that it was a "mare's egg," and if tended correctly, it would hatch a colt.

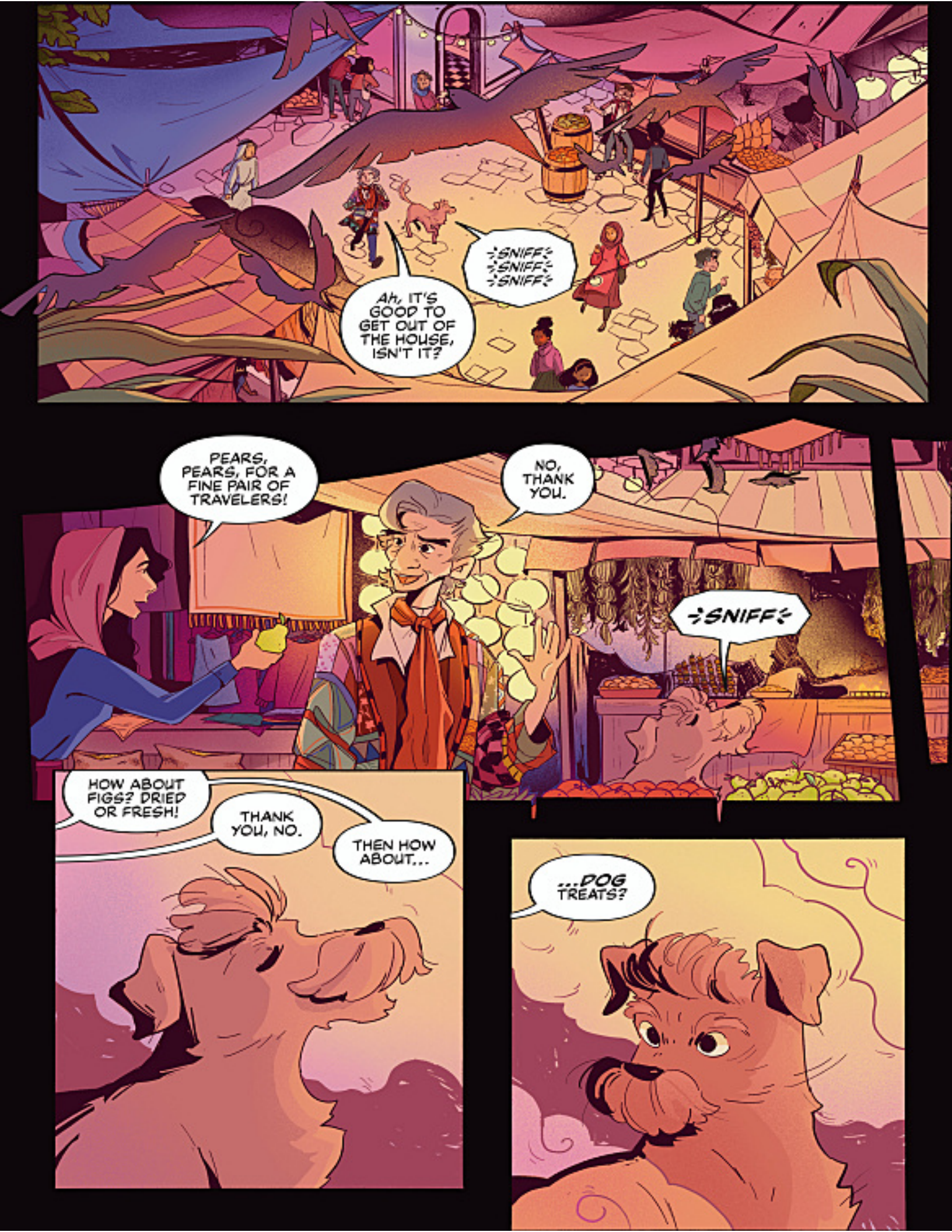
The story was written in English, and illustrated, and left a very strong impression on me. I think I already had, even as a child, a sense of foxes as tricksters; Disney's *Robin Hood* and *Aesop's Fables* more generally had built sly, foxy foundations in my head. But while a clever talking fox was to be expected, a horse hatching from a pumpkin seemed a peculiar and startling marvel, one I wouldn't encounter in stories again until adulthood; according to Hasan M. El-Shamy's *Types of the Folktale in the Arab World*, mistaking a pumpkin for a horse or donkey's egg has a long folkloric lineage.

For years afterwards, I'd occasionally recall the story of the fox and the pumpkin, the delightful strangeness of hatching a horse from an egg. When I was nineteen, engaged in a story-swapping game with my friend Jessica Wick, I wrote a fable drawing on medieval French traditions of Reynard that was very close to the story in this volume, featuring a conniving fox and a sequence of sly market sales. I trunked it—but when I was invited to contribute to a collection of tricksters, Reynard and his storied eggs leapt to my mind. I dug up the story, pulled an outline from my embarrassing nineteen-year-old prose, and rewrote it completely as a comic script. I like to think that it was waiting, after all this time, for an artist again, to be brought to life by Isa's gorgeous work.

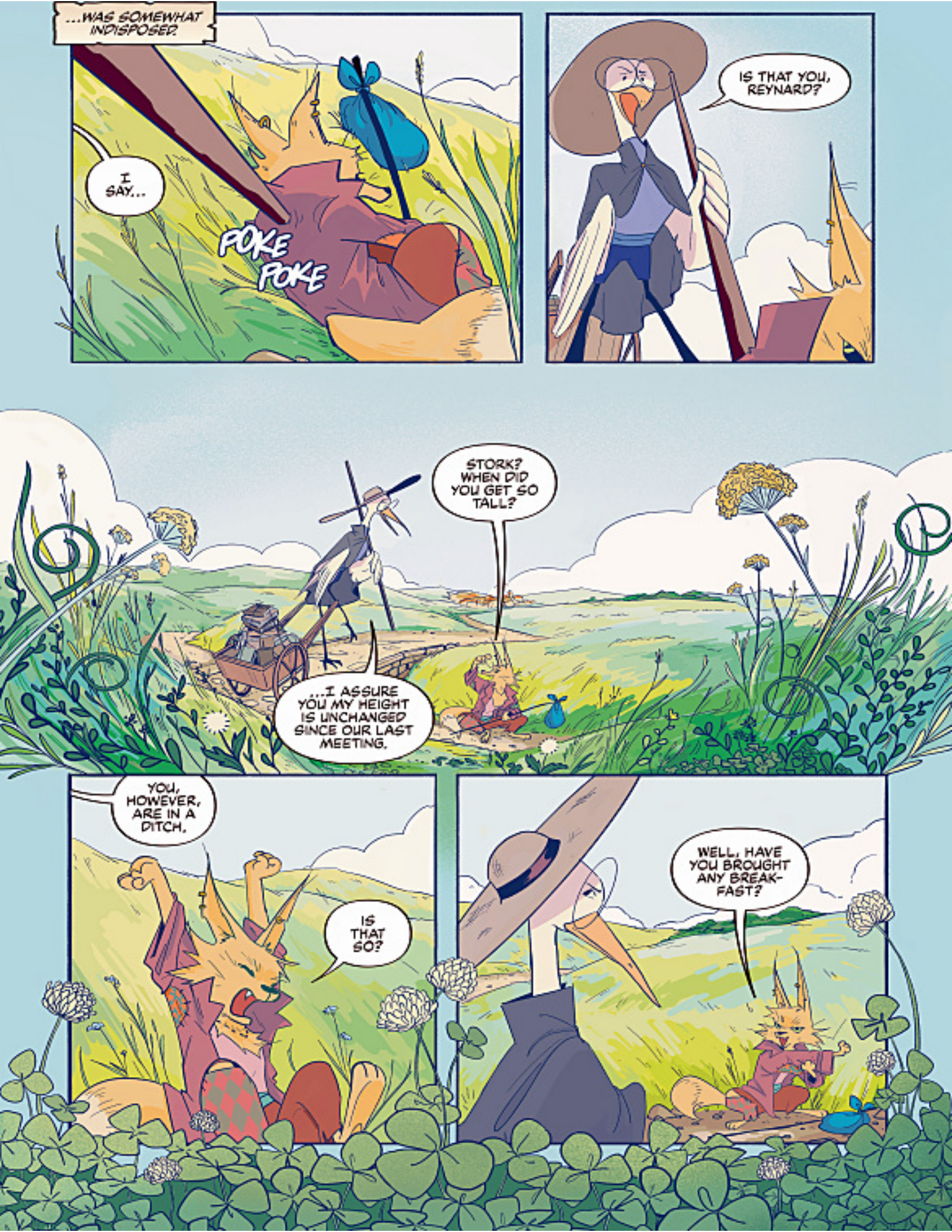
I could never find the book I read as a child; like the fox itself, it seemed to have vanished after accomplishing its trick. Happily, though, in preparing to write this introduction, I found it: Judy Varga's *The Mare's Egg*, published in 1972, long since out of print. And I was delighted to find further mystery: according to the archives of her agent, Judy Varga was a pseudonym used by Judy Stang. But Judy Stang's work looks nothing at all like Judy Varga's, and it's been historically very rare for an artist to adopt a pseudonym for a completely different style of work. What other secrets might she have kept?

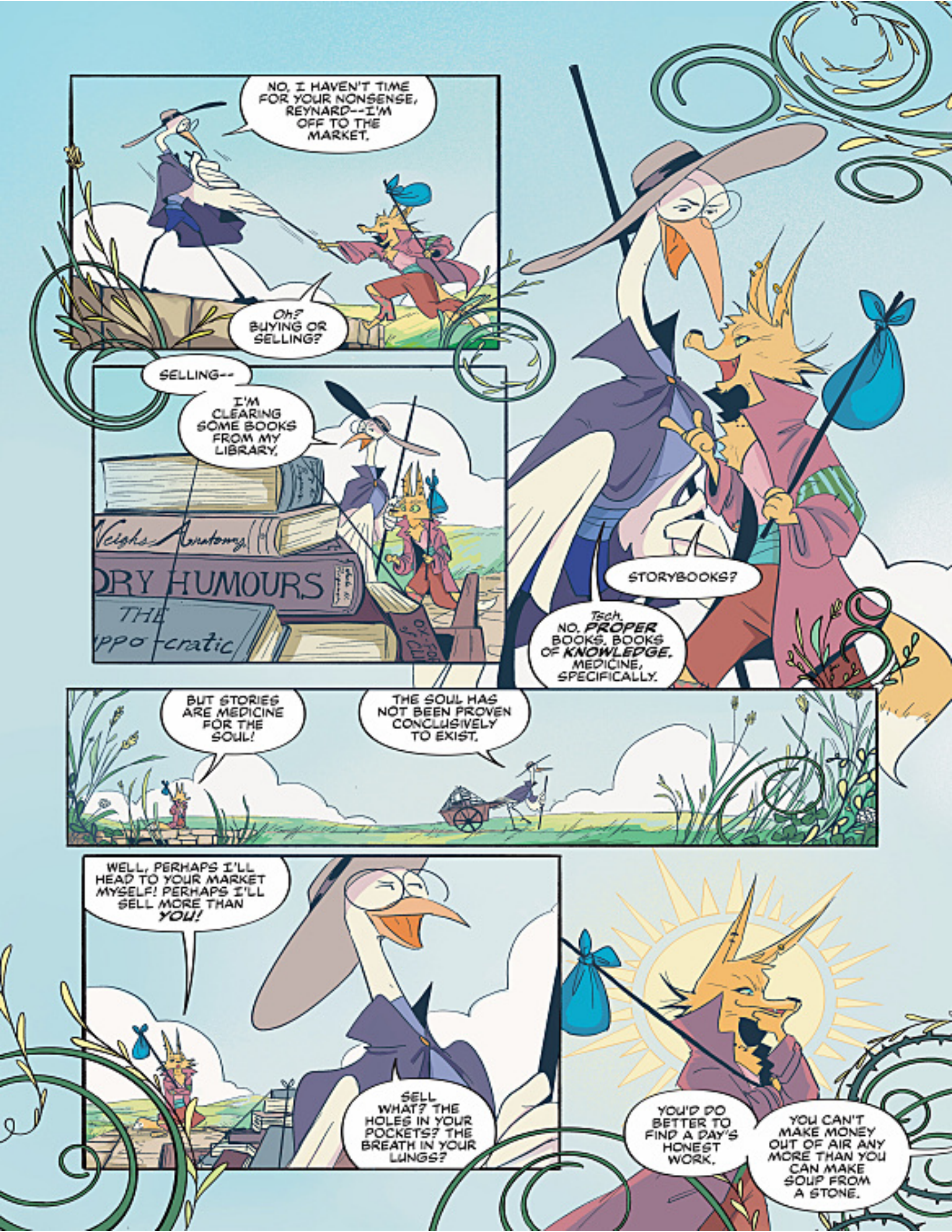
I could find very little else about Stang / Varga to share with you, but I'm so grateful for the gift of that story in childhood, the dazzling spark that burned bright in my memory while everything around it faded. That's what a good story does, from teller to teller: it plants a seed, grows and ripens until it's ready to harvest—or, perhaps, to hatch—and surprise you with what comes out.

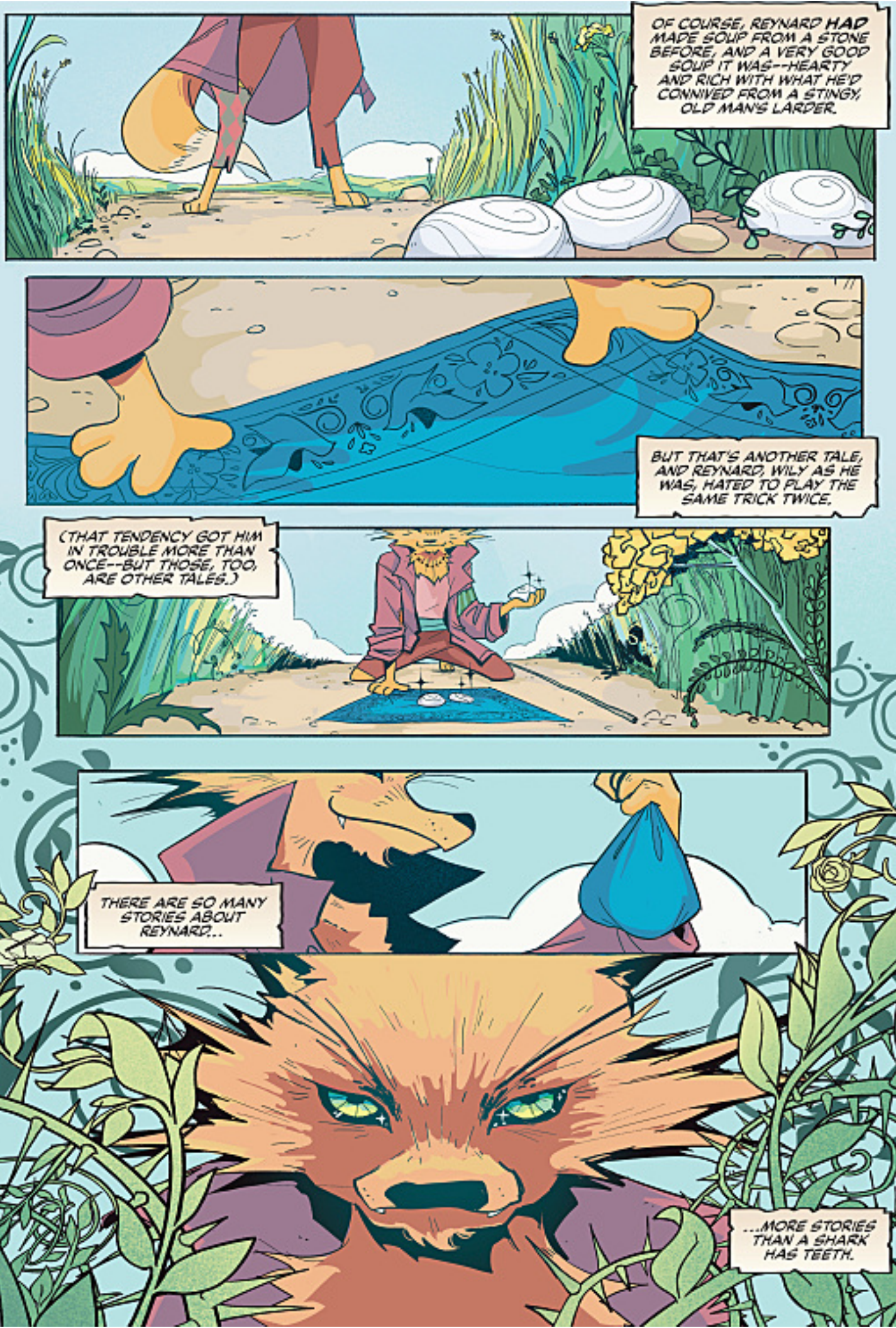
Amal El-Mohtar


AH, IT'S GOOD TO GET OUT OF THE HOUSE, ISN'T IT?
:SNIFF: :SNIFF: :SNIFF:
PEARS, PEARS, FOR A FINE PAIR OF TRAVELERS!
NO, THANK YOU.
:SNIFF:
HOW ABOUT FIGS? DRIED OR FRESH!
THANK YOU, NO.
THEN HOW ABOUT...
...DOG TREATS?

WHY, I HAVE TREATS TO MAKE A DOG'S COAT GLEAM LIKE GOLD AND SILK!
MY TREATS WILL GROW A DOG'S TEETH INTO DRAGON'S FANGS, HIS CLAWS TO MIGHTY TALONS!
MY TREATS WILL GIVE A DOG'S LIMBS THE STRENGTH OF SEVEN LIONS!
DON'T BE TAKEN IN, MY FRIEND, I KNOW A TELLER OF TALL TALES WHEN I SEE ONE.
I'd be happy with a treat to fill a dog's belly...
YOUR BELLY DESERVES BETTER! HOW ABOUT I TELL YOU A PROPER STORY INSTEAD?
I'M REMINDED OF ANOTHER MARKET, AND ANOTHER TELLER OF TALES...
HIS NAME WAS REYNARD, AND HE WAS A WILY FOX OF A FELLOW-- BUT AT THE BEGINNING OF THIS TALE, REYNARD...

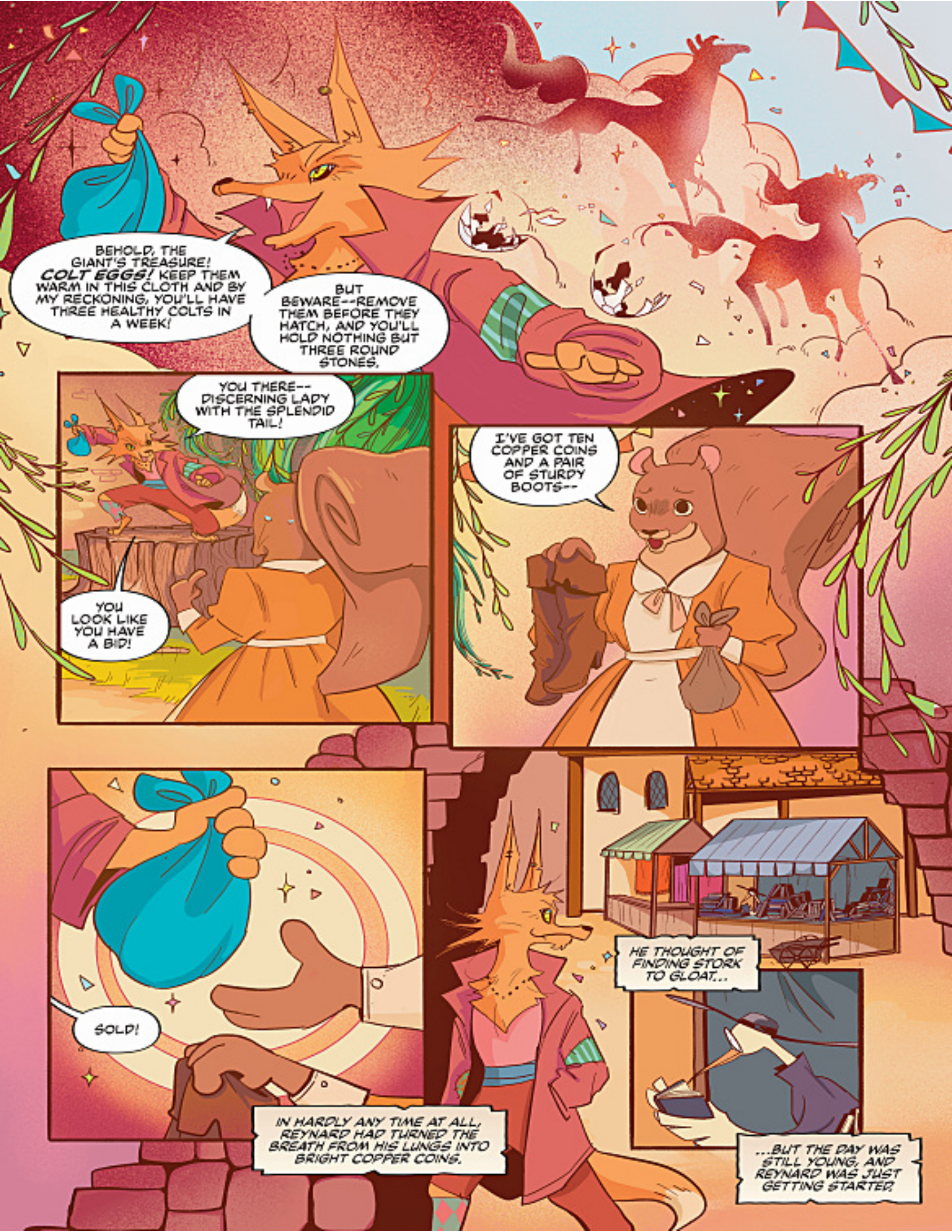

...WAS SOMEWHAT INDISPOSED.
I SAY...
POKE
POKE
IS THAT YOU, REYNARD?
STORK? WHEN DID YOU GET SO TALL?
...I ASSURE YOU MY HEIGHT IS UNCHANGED SINCE OUR LAST MEETING.
YOU, HOWEVER, ARE IN A DITCH.
IS THAT SO?
WELL, HAVE YOU BROUGHT ANY BREAK-FAST?

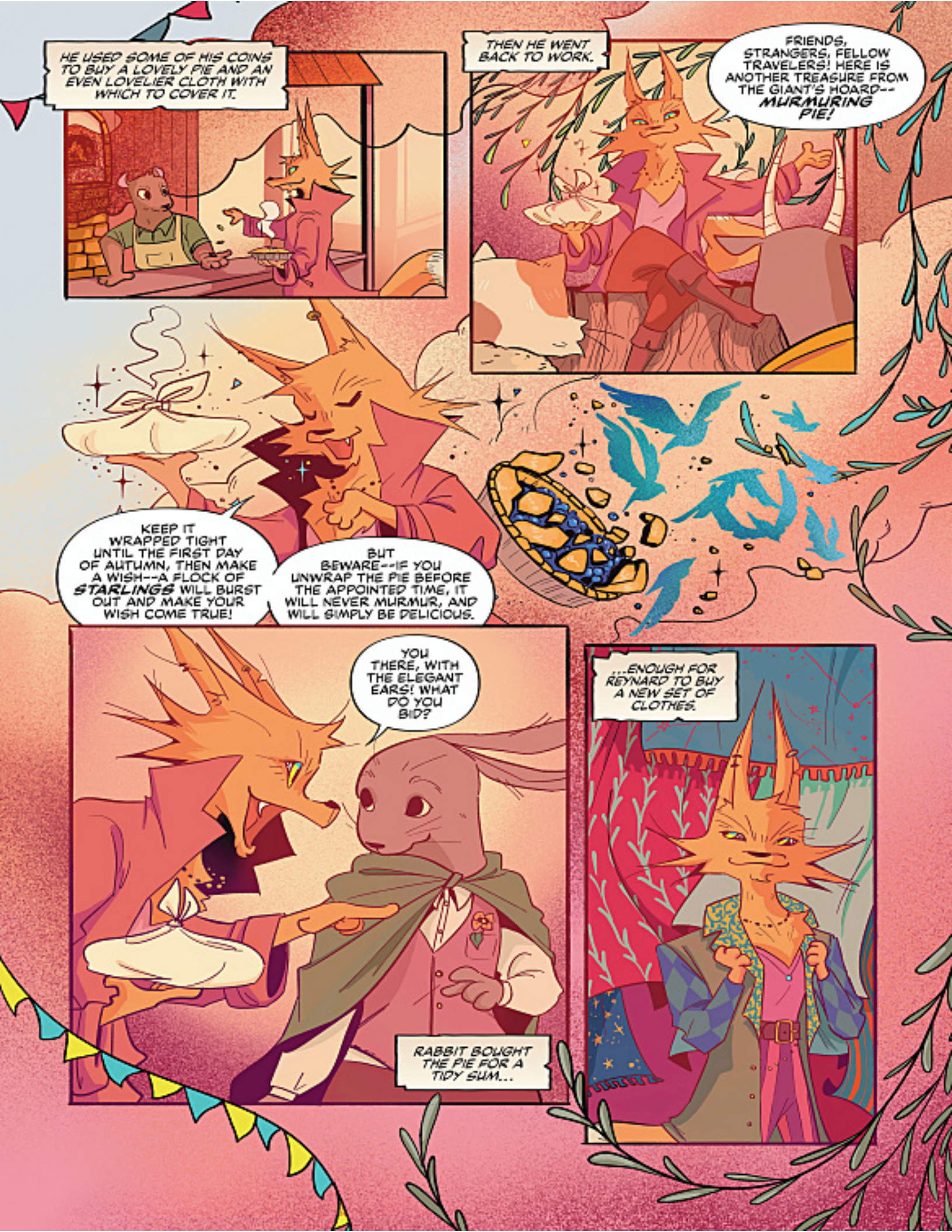

NO, I HAVEN'T TIME FOR YOUR NONSENSE, REYNARD--I'M OFF TO THE MARKET.
Oh? BUYING OR SELLING?
SELLING--
I'M CLEARING SOME BOOKS FROM MY LIBRARY.
STORYBOOKS?
Tsch. NO. PROPER BOOKS, BOOKS OF KNOWLEDGE. MEDICINE, SPECIFICALLY.
BUT STORIES ARE MEDICINE FOR THE SOUL!
THE SOUL HAS NOT BEEN PROVEN CONCLUSIVELY TO EXIST.
WELL, PERHAPS I'LL HEAD TO YOUR MARKET MYSELF! PERHAPS I'LL SELL MORE THAN YOU!
SELL WHAT? THE HOLES IN YOUR POCKETS? THE BREATH IN YOUR LUNGS?
YOU'D DO BETTER TO FIND A DAY'S HONEST WORK.
YOU CAN'T MAKE MONEY OUT OF AIR any more than you can make soup from a stone.


OF COURSE, REYNARD HAD MADE SOUP FROM A STONE BEFORE, AND A VERY GOOD SOUP IT WAS--HEARTY AND RICH WITH WHAT HE'D CONNIVED FROM A STINGY, OLD MAN'S LARDER.
BUT THAT'S ANOTHER TALE, AND REYNARD, WILY AS HE WAS, HATED TO PLAY THE SAME TRICK TWICE.
(THAT TENDENCY GOT HIM IN TROUBLE MORE THAN ONCE--BUT THOSE, TOO, ARE OTHER TALES.)
THERE ARE SO MANY STORIES ABOUT REYNARD...
...MORE STORIES THAN A SHARK HAS TEETH.

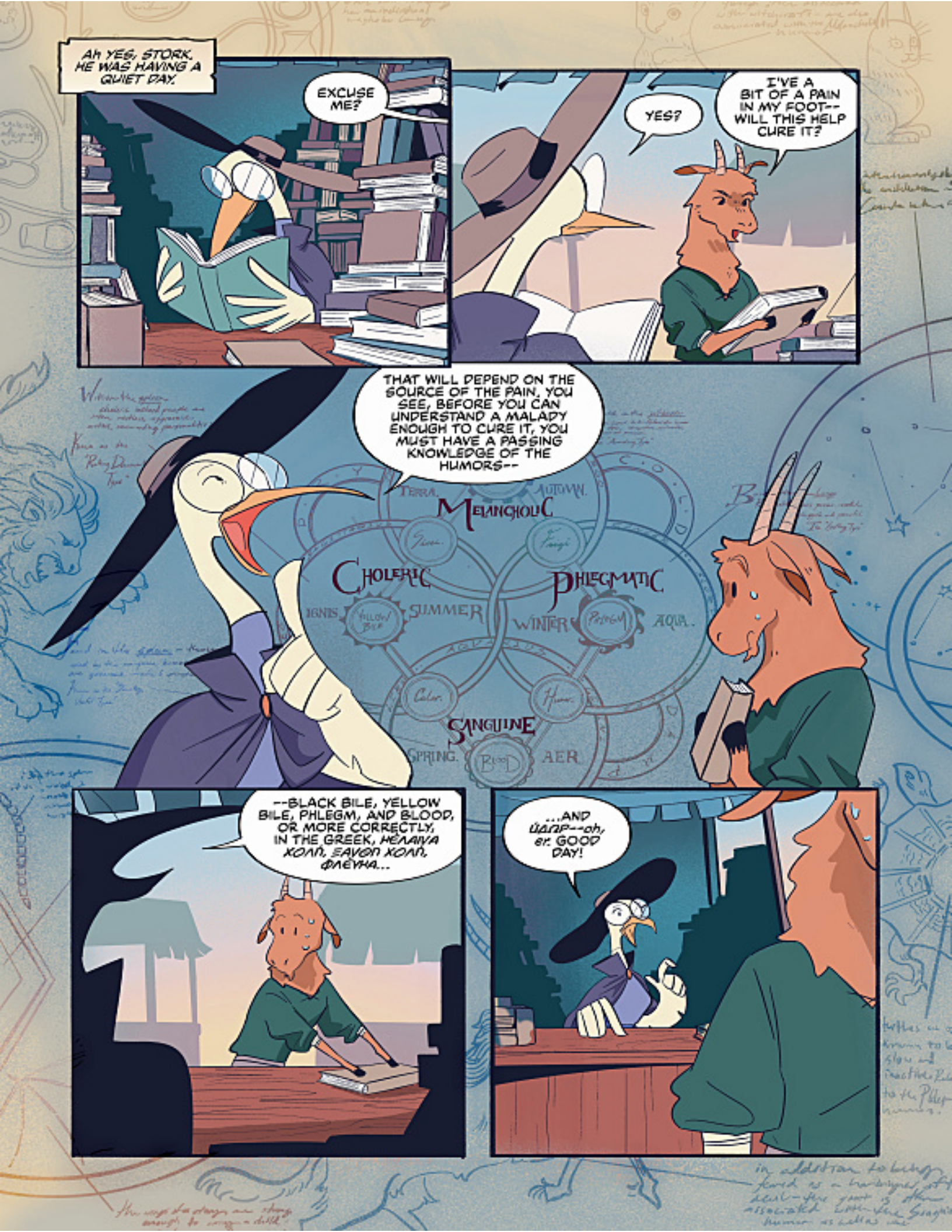
TODAY, HE'D SELL HIS BREATH...
...MAKE MONEY FROM A STONE...
...AND PROVE STORK WRONG BESIDES.

AHEM!
FRIENDS, STRANGERS, FELLOW TRAVELERS!
I'VE JOURNEYED FAR AND WIDE, AND SUFFERED GRAVE MISFORTUNE, ALL TO BRING YOU TREASURES FROM A DISTANT LAND!
BUT WHY SHOULD YOU LISTEN TO ME? I'M A MESS, OF COURSE, THERE'S A GOOD REASON FOR THAT, AND THAT REASON IS...
...I ROBBED A GIANT!

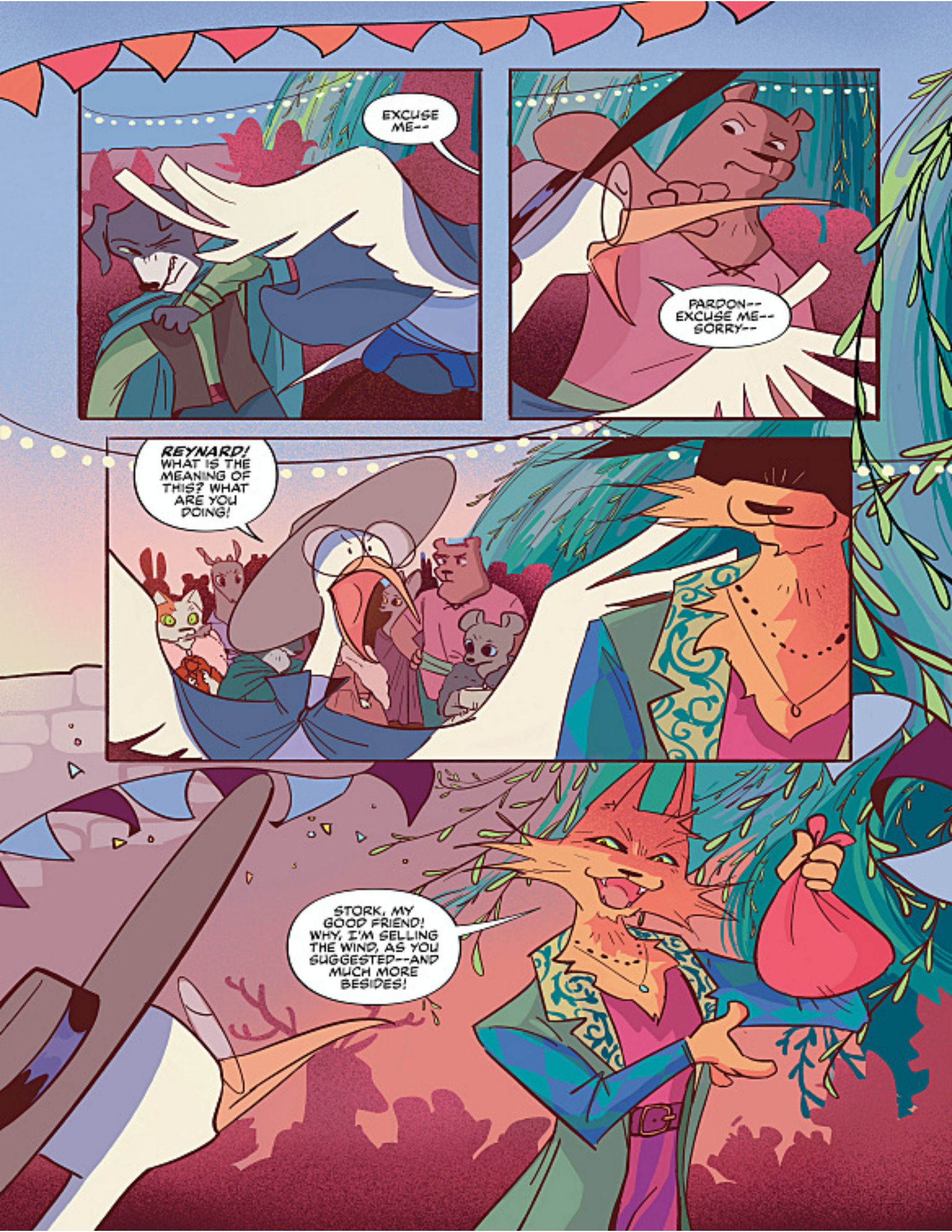

BEHOLD, THE GIANT'S TREASURE! COLT EGGS! KEEP THEM WARM IN THIS CLOTH AND BY MY RECKONING, YOU'LL HAVE THREE HEALTHY COLTS IN A WEEK!
BUT BEWARE--REMOVE THEM BEFORE THEY HATCH, AND YOU'LL HOLD NOTHING BUT THREE ROUND STONES.
YOU THERE-- DISCERNING LADY WITH THE SPLENDID TAIL!
YOU LOOK LIKE YOU HAVE A BID!
I'VE GOT TEN COPPER COINS AND A PAIR OF STURDY BOOTS--
SOLD!
IN HARDLY ANY TIME AT ALL, REYNARD HAD TURNED THE BREATH FROM HIS LUNGS INTO BRIGHT COPPER COINS.
HE THOUGHT OF FINDING STORK TO GLOAT...
...BUT THE DAY WAS STILL YOUNG, AND REYNARD WAS JUST GETTING STARTED

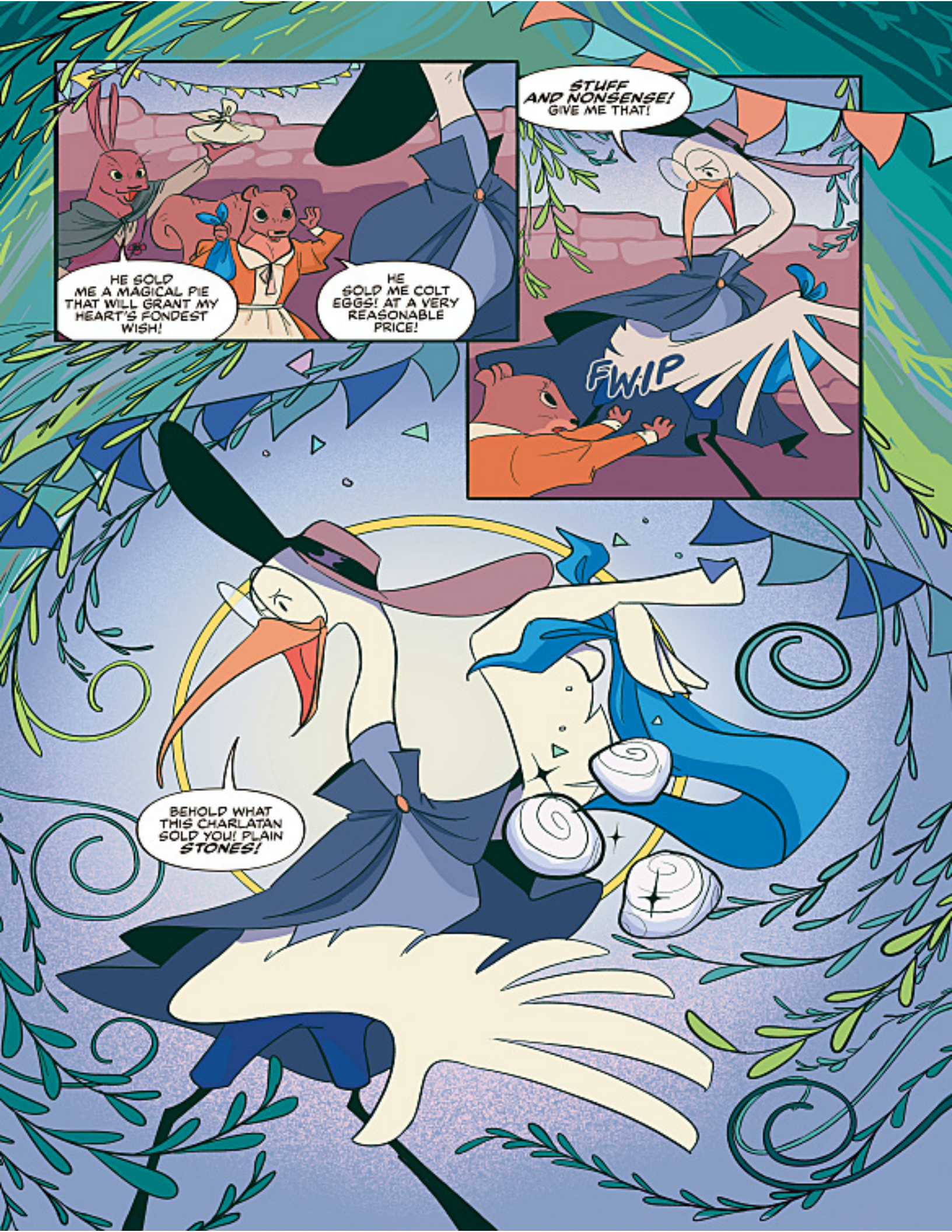

HE USED SOME OF HIS COINS TO BUY A LOVELY PIE AND AN EVEN LOVELIER CLOTH WITH WHICH TO COVER IT.
THEN HE WENT BACK TO WORK.
FRIENDS, STRANGERS, FELLOW TRAVELERS! HERE IS ANOTHER TREASURE FROM THE GIANT'S HOARD-- MURMURING PIE!
KEEP IT WRAPPED TIGHT UNTIL THE FIRST DAY OF AUTUMN, THEN MAKE A WISH--A FLOCK OF STARLINGS WILL BURST OUT AND MAKE YOUR WISH COME TRUE!
BUT BEWARE--IF YOU UNWRAP THE PIE BEFORE THE APPOINTED TIME, IT WILL NEVER MURMUR, AND WILL SIMPLY BE DELICIOUS.
YOU THERE, WITH THE ELEGANT EARS! WHAT DO YOU BID?
RABBIT BOUGHT THE PIE FOR A TIDY SUM...
...ENOUGH FOR REYNARD TO BUY A NEW SET OF CLOTHES.

IMAGINE WANTING CLOTHES MORE THAN A PIE! PIES ARE BETTER THAN CLOTHES.
Mm. WELL, IT'S GOOD TO VALUE THE IMPORTANT THINGS IN LIFE.
clink
THINGS LIKE STORIES, FOR EXAMPLE, AND ALL THE DIFFERENT WAYS OF TELLING THEM.
Hmph. SO WHAT WAS STORK UP TO ALL THIS TIME?


AH YES, STORK. HE WAS HAVING A QUIET DAY.
EXCUSE ME?
YES?
I'VE A BIT OF A PAIN IN MY FOOT-- WILL THIS HELP CURE IT?
THAT WILL DEPEND ON THE SOURCE OF THE PAIN, YOU SEE, BEFORE YOU CAN UNDERSTAND A MALADY ENOUGH TO CURE IT, YOU MUST HAVE A PASSING KNOWLEDGE OF THE HUMORS--
MELANCHOLIC
CHOLERIC
PHLEGMATIC
SANGUINE
--BLACK BILE, YELLOW BILE, PHLEGM, AND BLOOD, OR MORE CORRECTLY, IN THE GREEK, ΜΕΛΑΙΝΑ ΧΟΛΗ, ΞΑΝΘΗ ΧΟΛΗ, ΦΛΕΓΜΑ...
...AND ΰδωρ--oh, er. GOOD DAY!

RATHER QUIET IN THE MARKET TODAY.
ALTHOUGH... WHAT COULD BE GOING ON OVER THERE?
FRIENDS, STRANGERS, FELLOW TRAVELERS!
THIS IS THE LAST OF THE GIANT'S TREASURES. WITHIN THIS SACK ARE CAPTURED THE FOUR WINDS!


EXCUSE ME--
PARDON-- EXCUSE ME-- SORRY--
REYNARD! WHAT IS THE MEANING OF THIS? WHAT ARE YOU DOING!
STORK, MY GOOD FRIEND! WHY, I'M SELLING THE WIND, AS YOU SUGGESTED--AND MUCH MORE BESIDES!

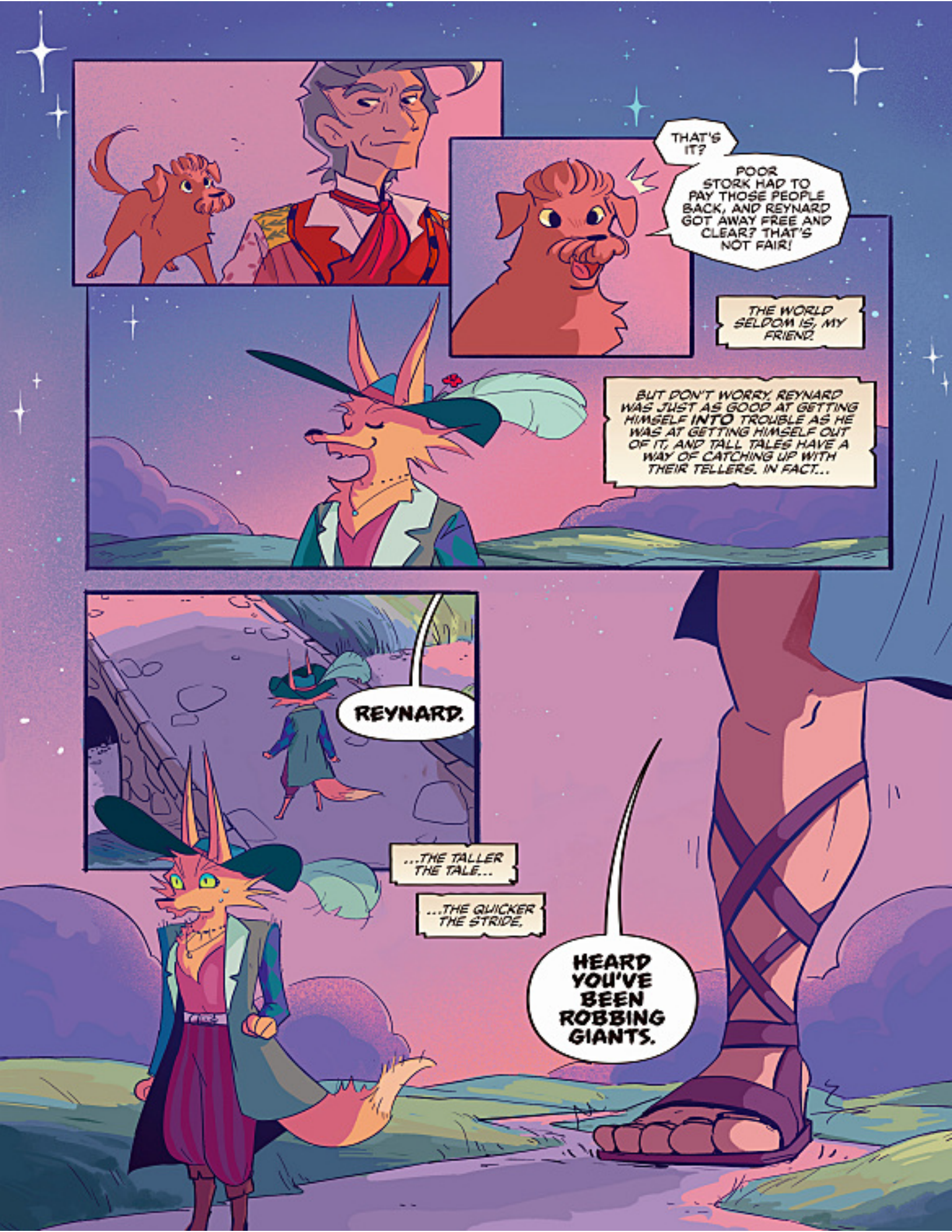

HE SOLD ME A MAGICAL PIE THAT WILL GRANT MY HEART'S FONDEST WISH!
HE SOLD ME COLT EGGS! AT A VERY REASONABLE PRICE!
STUFF AND NONSENSE! GIVE ME THAT!
FWIP
BEHOLD WHAT THIS CHARLATAN SOLD YOU! PLAIN STONES!

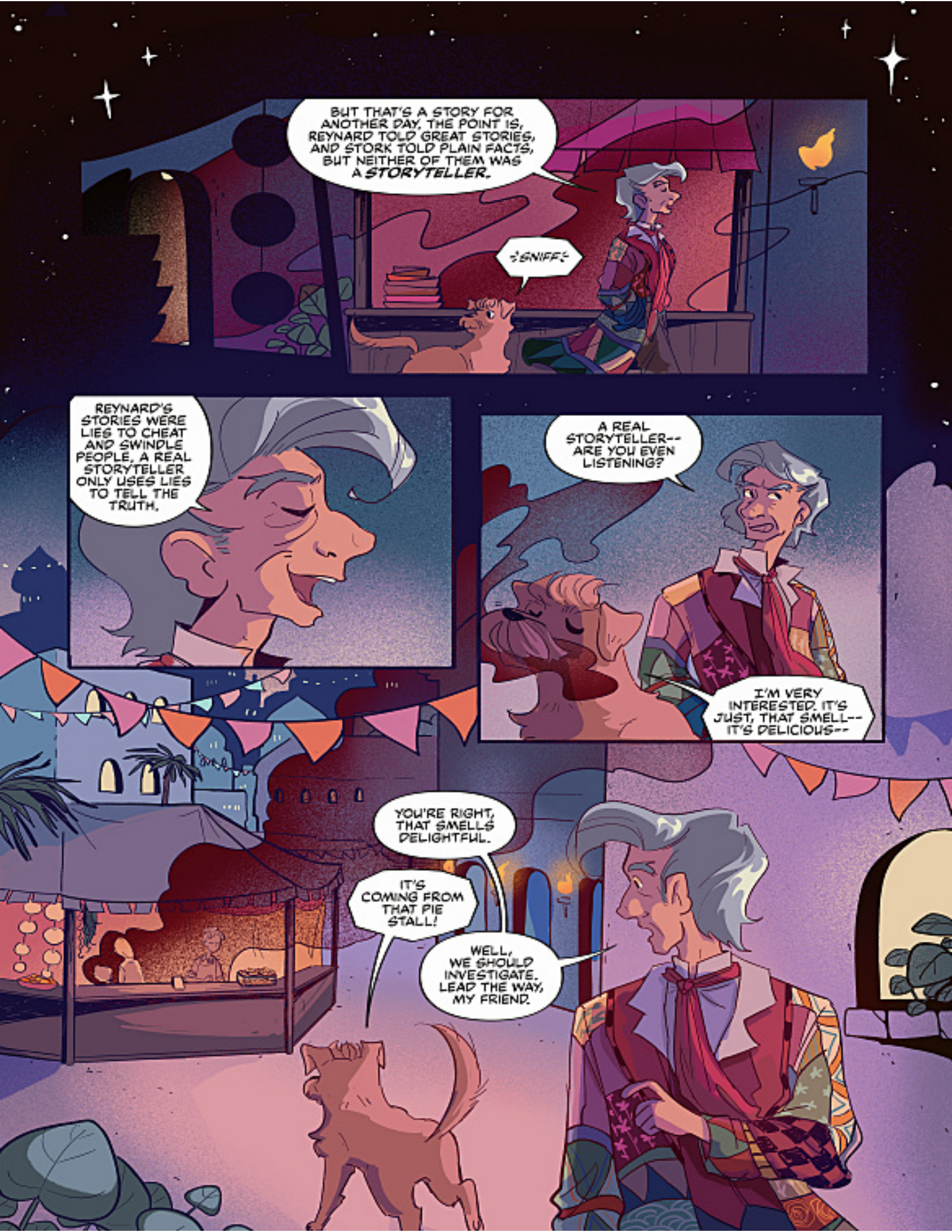
HOW DARE YOU! SCOUNDREL! YOU'VE GONE AND RUINED MY INVESTMENT! REYNARD SAID THIS WOULD HAPPEN!
BUT-- BUT I--
GIVE ME THAT PIE!
HEY!
SEE? JUST A REGULAR PIE! DELICIOUS, PERHAPS--BUT NOT MAGICAL!

THIEF! HOW DARE YOU! REYNARD SAID THIS WOULD HAPPEN!
I DEMAND COMPENSATION!
BUT--HE LIED TO YOU! THESE ARE JUST ORDINARY OBJECTS!
MAGIC ISN'T REAL!
WHAT ELSE CAN I--Ah, OF COURSE.
GIVE ME THAT! I'LL PROVE ONCE AND FOR ALL THAT YOU'RE A LIAR AND A CHEAT!

CAREFUL, MY FRIEND--
--OPENING THAT SACK WILL UNLEASH ALL FOUR WINDS AT ONCE, AND SUMMON A STORM TO DROWN THE WHOLE WIDE WORLD!
gulp
THE SKY! IT'S DARKENING!
I THINK I HEAR THUNDER!
I THINK I SMELL RAIN!
ROT AND RUBBISH! LOOK, THERE'S NOTHING--

HE'S OPENING THE BAG!
STOP HIM!
GRAB HIM, QUICK!
BAH! UNHAND ME, YOU FOOLS!
SIX SILVER CROWNS OR I'LL HAVE THEM OUT OF YOUR HIDE!
TEN COPPER PIECES AND A STURDY PAIR OF BOOTS, AND NOT A PENNY LESS, YOU HEAR? I HAD GREAT PLANS FOR THOSE COLTS!
OTTER! YOU SAIL THE SEAS--WHAT SAY YOU TO A SACK OF STRONG WIND?
I SAY THAT SOUNDS MIGHTY FINE.
HAVING SOLD THE LAST OF HIS WARES, REYNARD BOUGHT HIMSELF A DASHING HAT...
...AND WALKED OFF, WELL PLEASED, INTO THE WARM SUMMER EVENING.

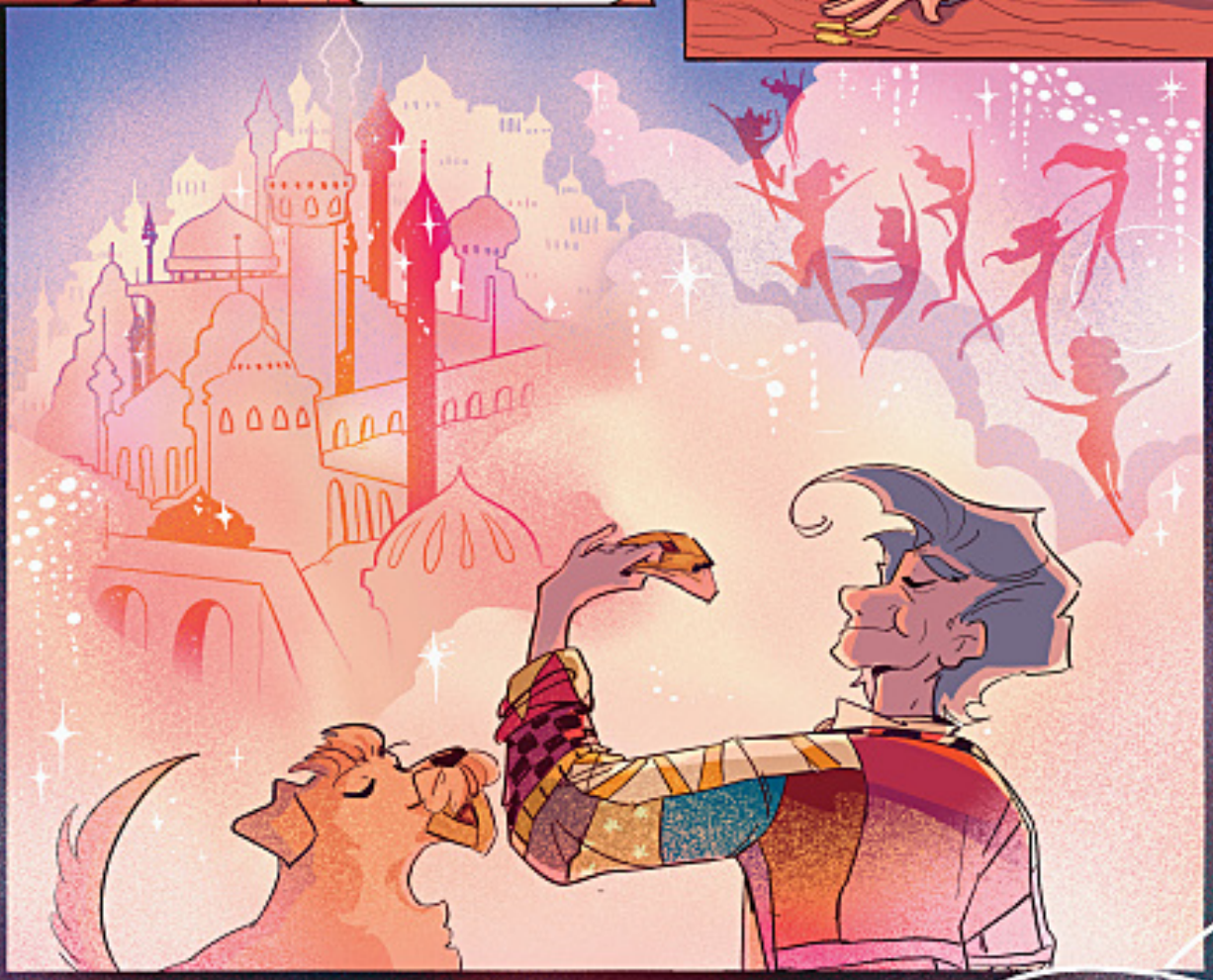

THAT'S IT?
POOR STORK HAD TO PAY THOSE PEOPLE BACK, AND REYNARD GOT AWAY FREE AND CLEAR? THAT'S NOT FAIR!
THE WORLD SELDOM IS, MY FRIEND.
BUT DON'T WORRY. REYNARD WAS JUST AS GOOD AT GETTING HIMSELF INTO TROUBLE AS HE WAS AT GETTING HIMSELF OUT OF IT, AND TALL TALES HAVE A WAY OF CATCHING UP WITH THEIR TELLERS. IN FACT...
REYNARD.
...THE TALLER THE TALE...
...THE QUICKER THE STRIDE.
HEARD YOU'VE BEEN ROBBING GIANTS.


BUT THAT'S A STORY FOR ANOTHER DAY. THE POINT IS, REYNARD TOLD GREAT STORIES, AND STORK TOLD PLAIN FACTS, BUT NEITHER OF THEM WAS A STORYTELLER.
SNIFF
REYNARD'S STORIES WERE LIES TO CHEAT AND SWINDLE PEOPLE. A REAL STORYTELLER ONLY USES LIES TO TELL THE TRUTH.
A REAL STORYTELLER-- ARE YOU EVEN LISTENING?
I'M VERY INTERESTED. IT'S JUST, THAT SMELL-- IT'S DELICIOUS--
YOU'RE RIGHT, THAT SMELLS DELIGHTFUL.
IT'S COMING FROM THAT PIE STALL!
WELL, WE SHOULD INVESTIGATE. LEAD THE WAY, MY FRIEND.

PIES FOR SALE, PIES FOR SALE! MEAT FOR A TREAT, CHEESE IF YOU PLEASE!
NO PIES LIKE MY SISTER'S PIES ON THIS SIDE OF PARADISE!

FATAYER! WHEN I EAT THEM, IT'S LIKE THERE'S A PALACE ON MY TONGUE FULL OF FINE DANCING!
DON'T THEY SMELL SO GOOD THAT YOU COULD JUST FLOAT AWAY ON A CLOUD OF YOUR OWN HAPPINESS?

THEY DO INDEED. TWO, PLEASE, FOR MY FRIEND AND ME.



THE END.

TALE FOUR VARIANT COVER
DANI PENDERGAST

LOKI *the* MATCHMAKER

Scraps. That's all we really have of Norse mythology. From those, and what was woven into Scandinavian culture throughout the centuries after Christianization, we have impressions of who the Vikings were. But those impressions change with the eyes that see them and the tongues that interpret them. In pop culture today, the image of a Viking connotes an untamed, bearded powerhouse of blue-eyed manliness. This story plays with that image, and has done so since at least the thirteenth century.

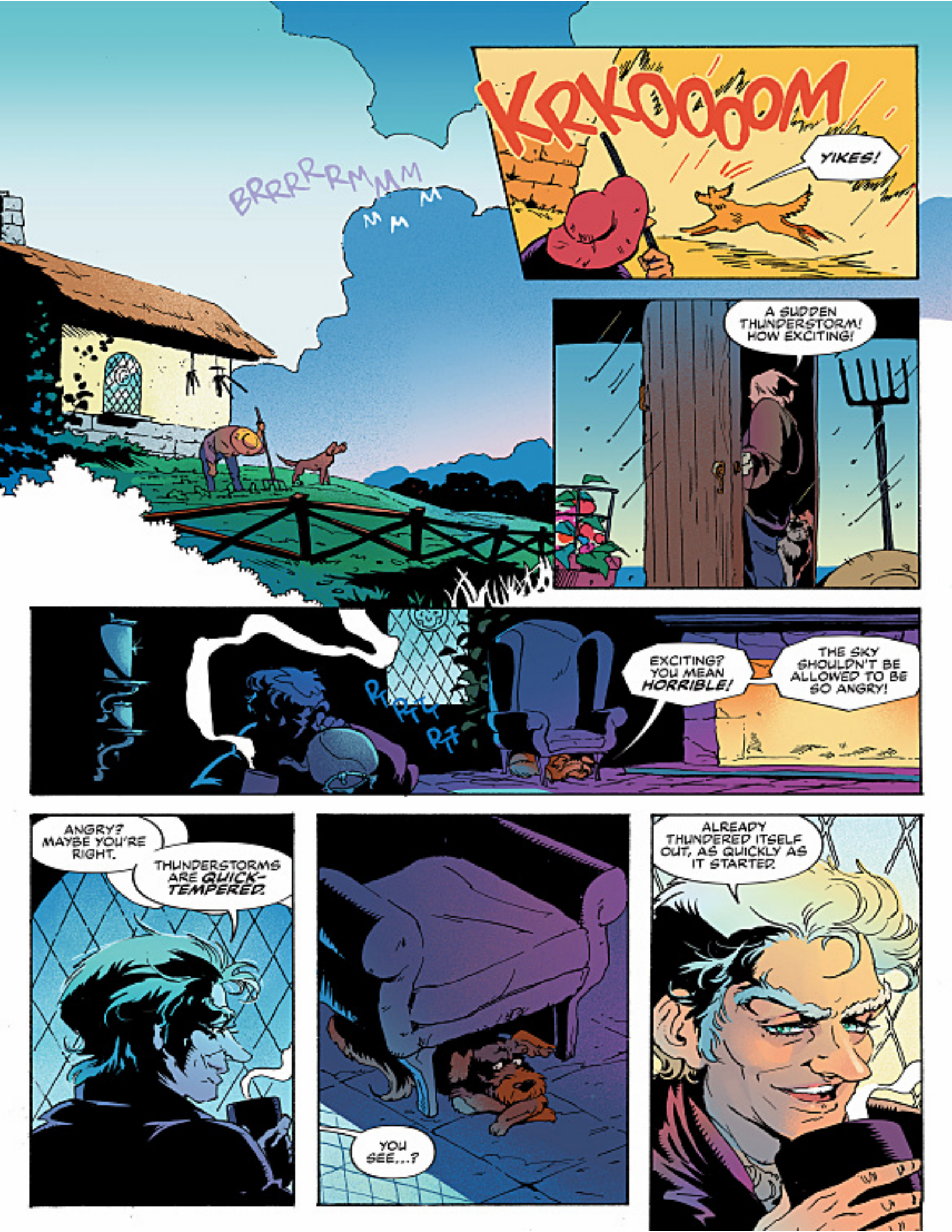
The original tale we've adapted, *Þrymskviđ*, or *The Lay of Thrym*, is from the Poetic Edda, a collection of Old Norse poems from which so much of what we know about the Norse gods derives. Interpretations vary, and there's some controversy as to whether the collection is ancient or is in fact a Christian-era lampoon of the Pagan gods. Thor, after all, is seen as the "manliest" of the gods, with his big ego and bigger hammer.

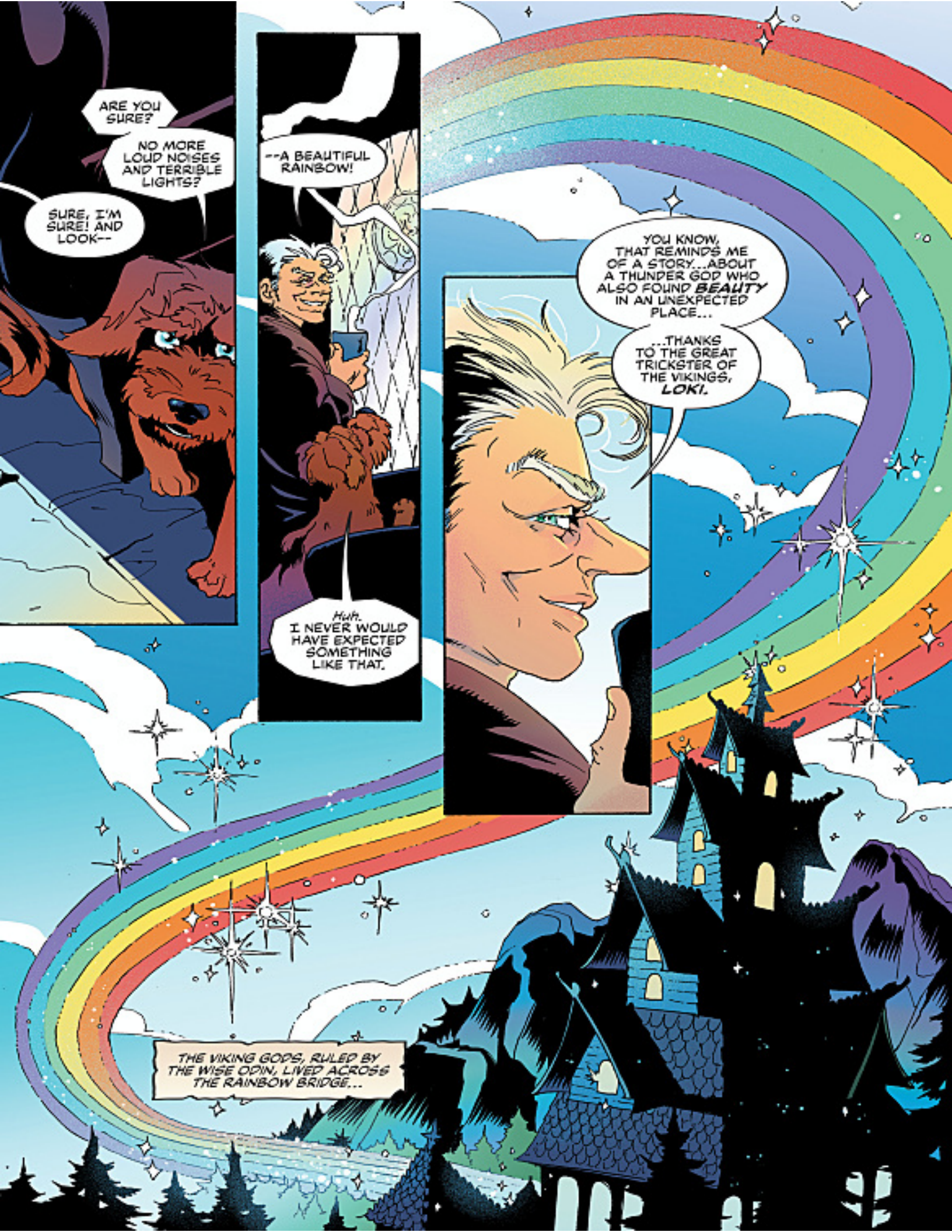
Scraps are all queer folks have, too, of their existence throughout world history. And so we interpret. This story, while staying very close to the original beats of *The Lay* as we understood it, is definitely our own. Instead of relying on strict, sexist gender roles to set up a comedic reversal, like a man-in-drag played for laughs in an old Hollywood movie, we wanted to bring the fluid sensibilities of modern gender-based performances.

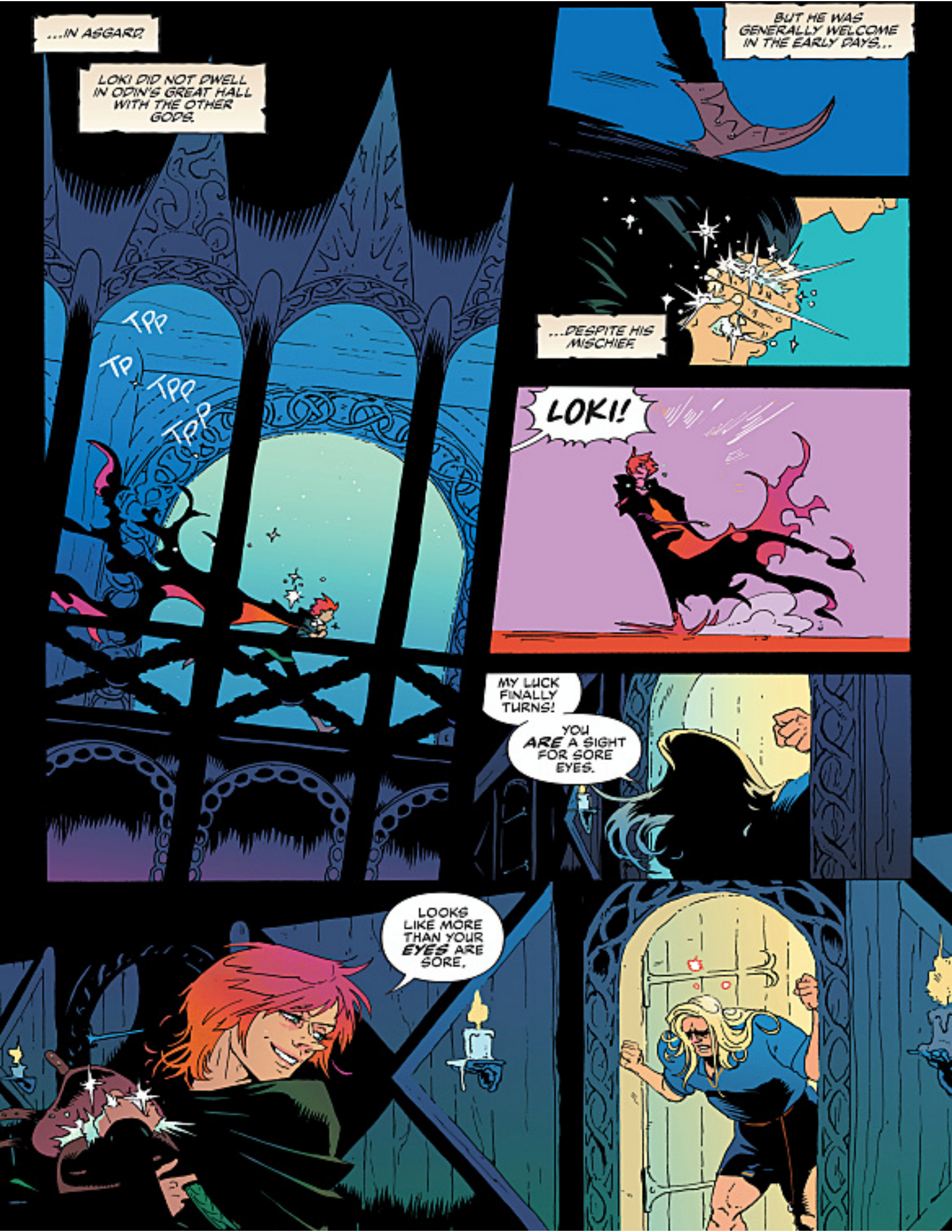
Loki was there to smooth that transition. A god of fire and mischief—one who does some of the most heroic and most evil deeds in the Eddas—he has captured the imagination of so many. To create this story, we had to dive deep into research to separate the mythological Loki from the pop culture Loki, and realized that every version feels like less of a new twist and more like a revealed facet of the character. Loki is all interpretation. And certainly not here to reinforce a strict gender binary.

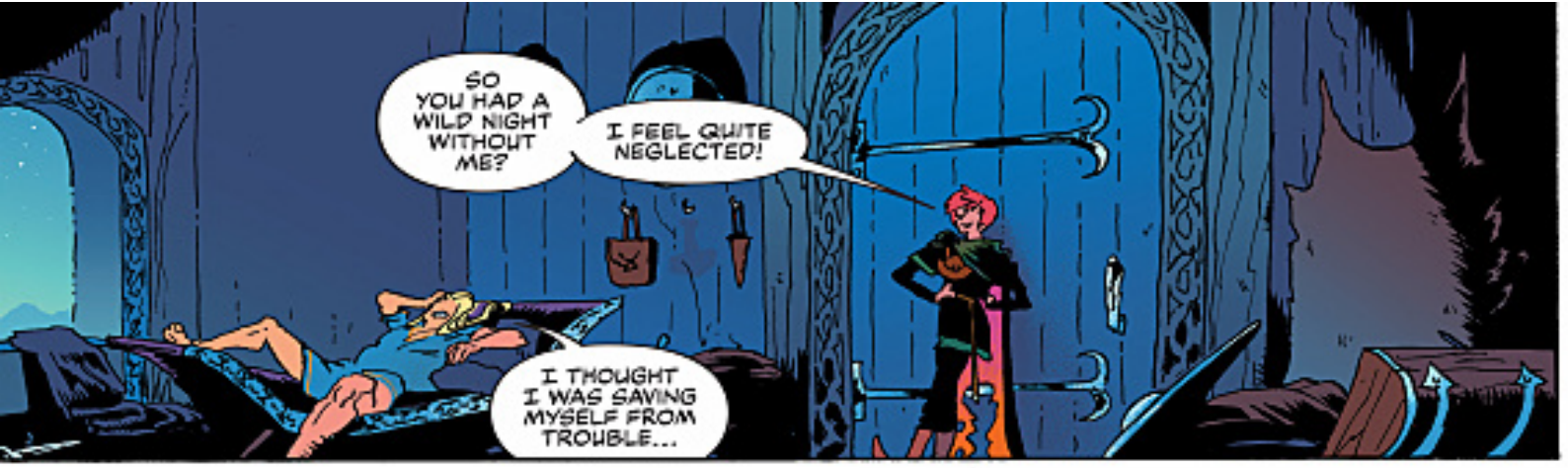
Revisiting this tale was a way to sew these scraps together into something that we hope fits like a glove. Or a wedding dress.

Robin Kaplan & A.L. Kaplan


BRRRRRMMMM
KRKOOOOOM
YIKES!
A SUDDEN THUNDERSTORM! HOW EXCITING!
EXCITING? YOU MEAN HORRIBLE!
THE SKY SHOULDN'T BE ALLOWED TO BE SO ANGRY!
ANGRY? MAYBE YOU'RE RIGHT.
THUNDERSTORMS ARE QUICK-TEMPERED.
YOU SEE...?
ALREADY THUNDERED ITSELF OUT, AS QUICKLY AS IT STARTED.


ARE YOU SURE?
NO MORE LOUD NOISES AND TERRIBLE LIGHTS?
SURE, I'M SURE! AND LOOK--
--A BEAUTIFUL RAINBOW!
Huh. I NEVER WOULD HAVE EXPECTED SOMETHING LIKE THAT.
YOU KNOW, THAT REMINDS ME OF A STORY...ABOUT A THUNDER GOD WHO ALSO FOUND BEAUTY IN AN UNEXPECTED PLACE...
...THANKS TO THE GREAT TRICKSTER OF THE VIKINGS, LOKI.
THE VIKING GODS, RULED BY THE WISE ODIN, LIVED ACROSS THE RAINBOW BRIDGE...

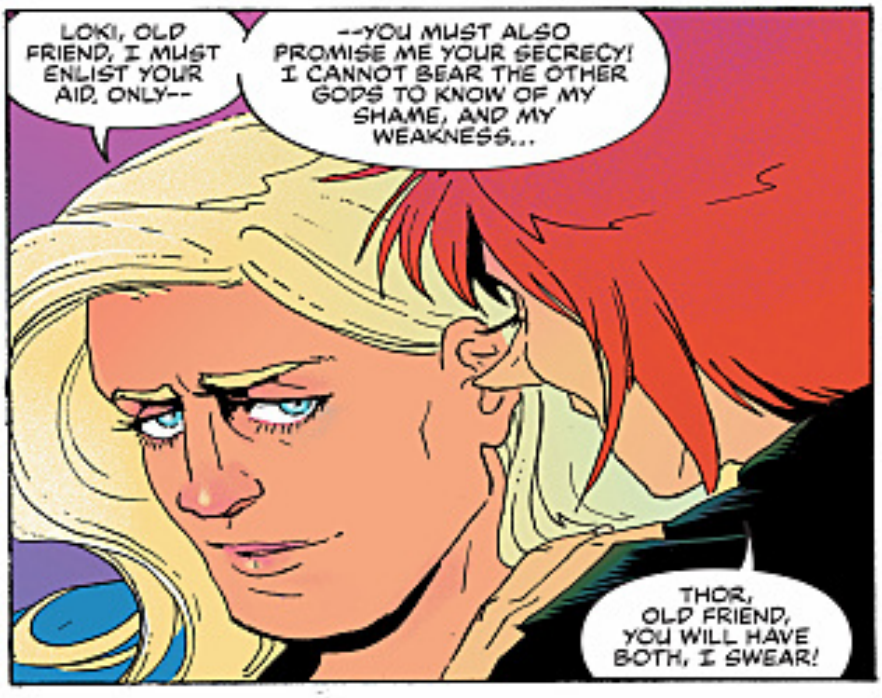

...IN ASGARD
LOKI DID NOT DWELL IN ODIN'S GREAT HALL WITH THE OTHER GODS.
TPP
TP
TPP
TPP
BUT HE WAS GENERALLY WELCOME IN THE EARLY DAYS...
...DESPITE HIS MISCHIEF
LOKI!
MY LUCK FINALLY TURNS!
YOU ARE A SIGHT FOR SORE EYES.
LOOKS LIKE MORE THAN YOUR EYES ARE SORE.


SO YOU HAD A WILD NIGHT WITHOUT ME?
I FEEL QUITE NEGLECTED!
I THOUGHT I WAS SAVING MYSELF FROM TROUBLE...

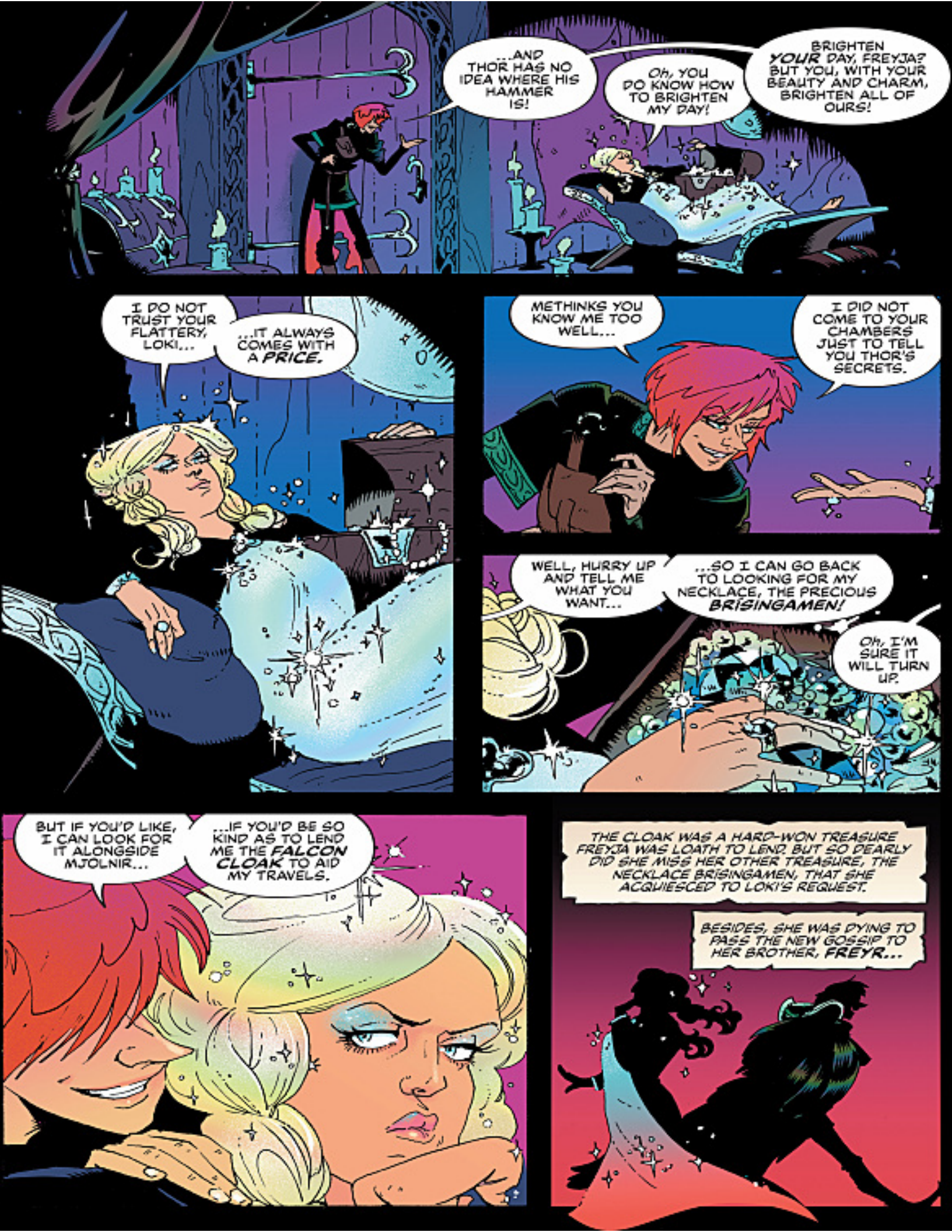
...BUT ALAS! IT WOULD SEEM I FIND TROUBLE WITHOUT YOU, AS WELL, AND I CANNOT EVEN REMEMBER THE DETAILS OF MY EXPLOITS...
HOW DISAPPOINTING.

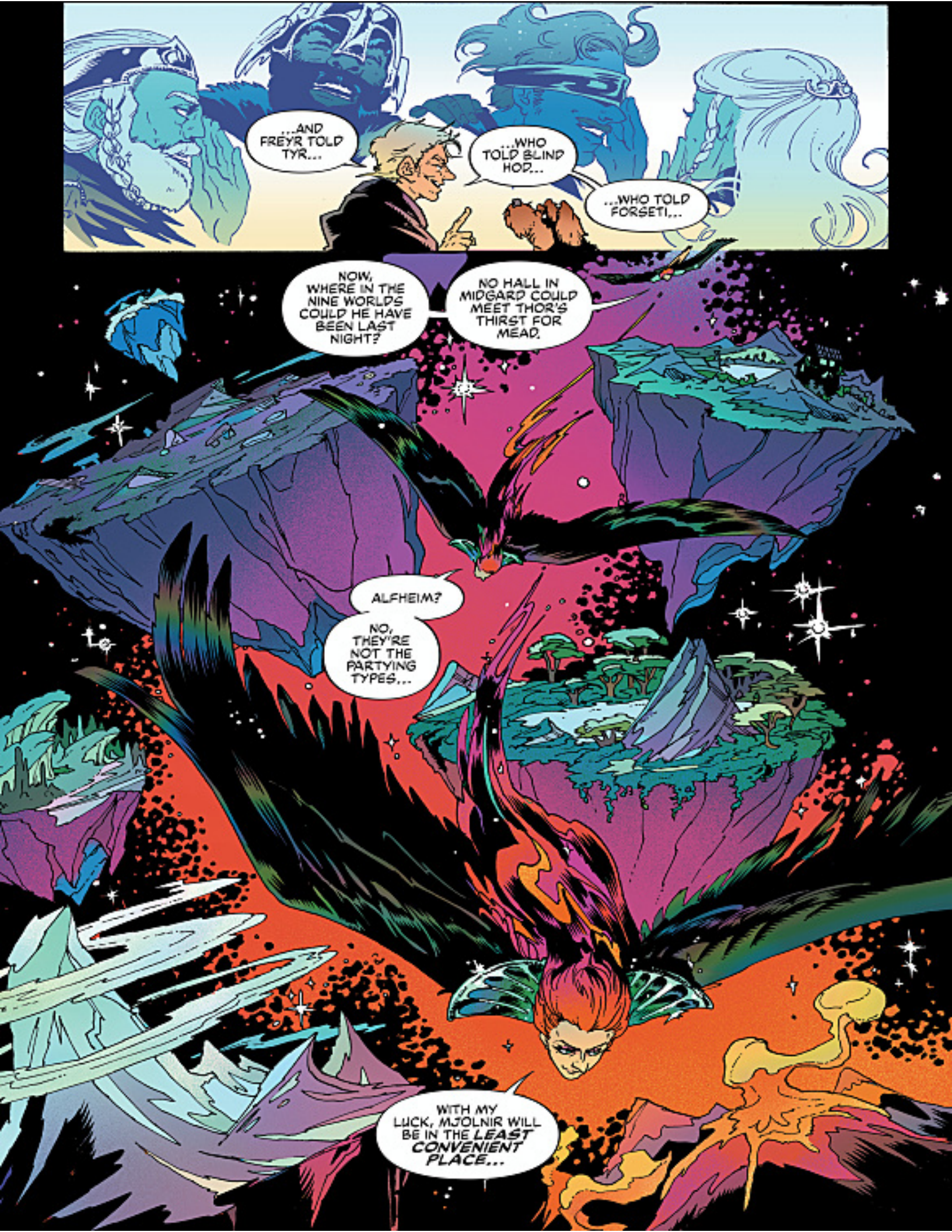
...I KNOW ONLY THE DIRE PREDICAMENT THAT I HAVE AWAKENED INTO!

Oh?

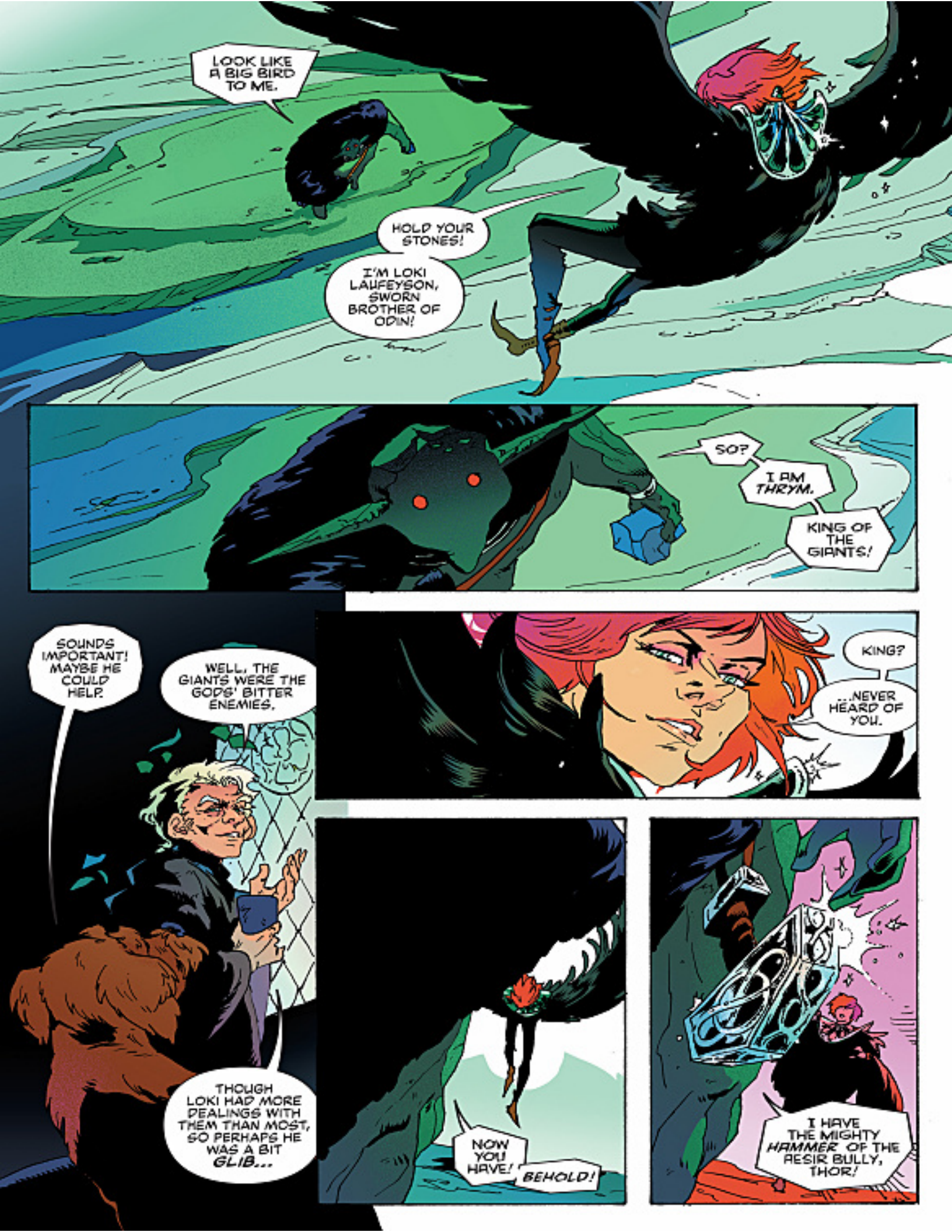

LOKI, OLD FRIEND, I MUST ENLIST YOUR AID, ONLY--
--YOU MUST ALSO PROMISE ME YOUR SECRECY! I CANNOT BEAR THE OTHER GODS TO KNOW OF MY SHAME, AND MY WEAKNESS...
THOR, OLD FRIEND, YOU WILL HAVE BOTH, I SWEAR!

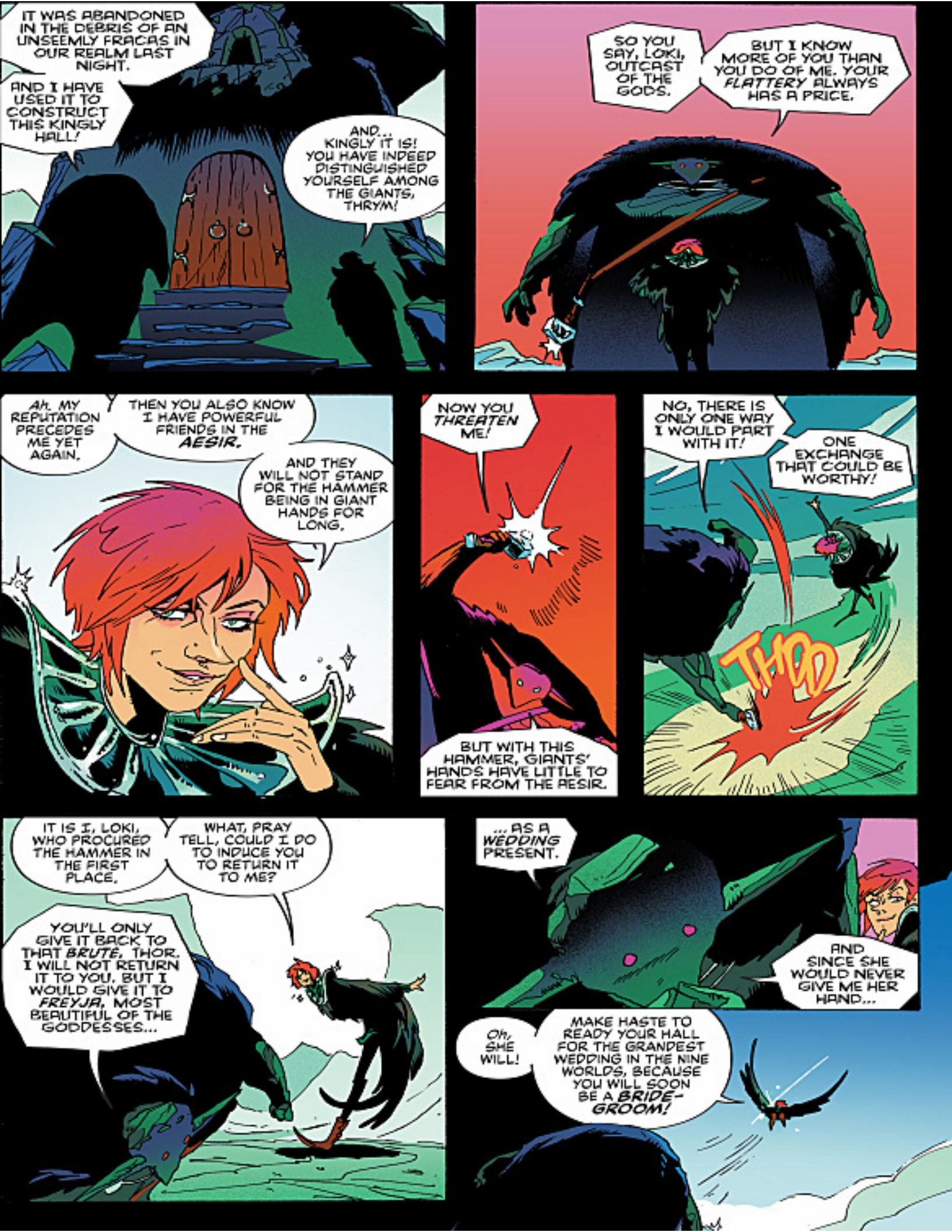
THE THUNDER GOD RELATED HIS MISERY TO LOKI, WHO KNEW JUST WHAT TO DO...

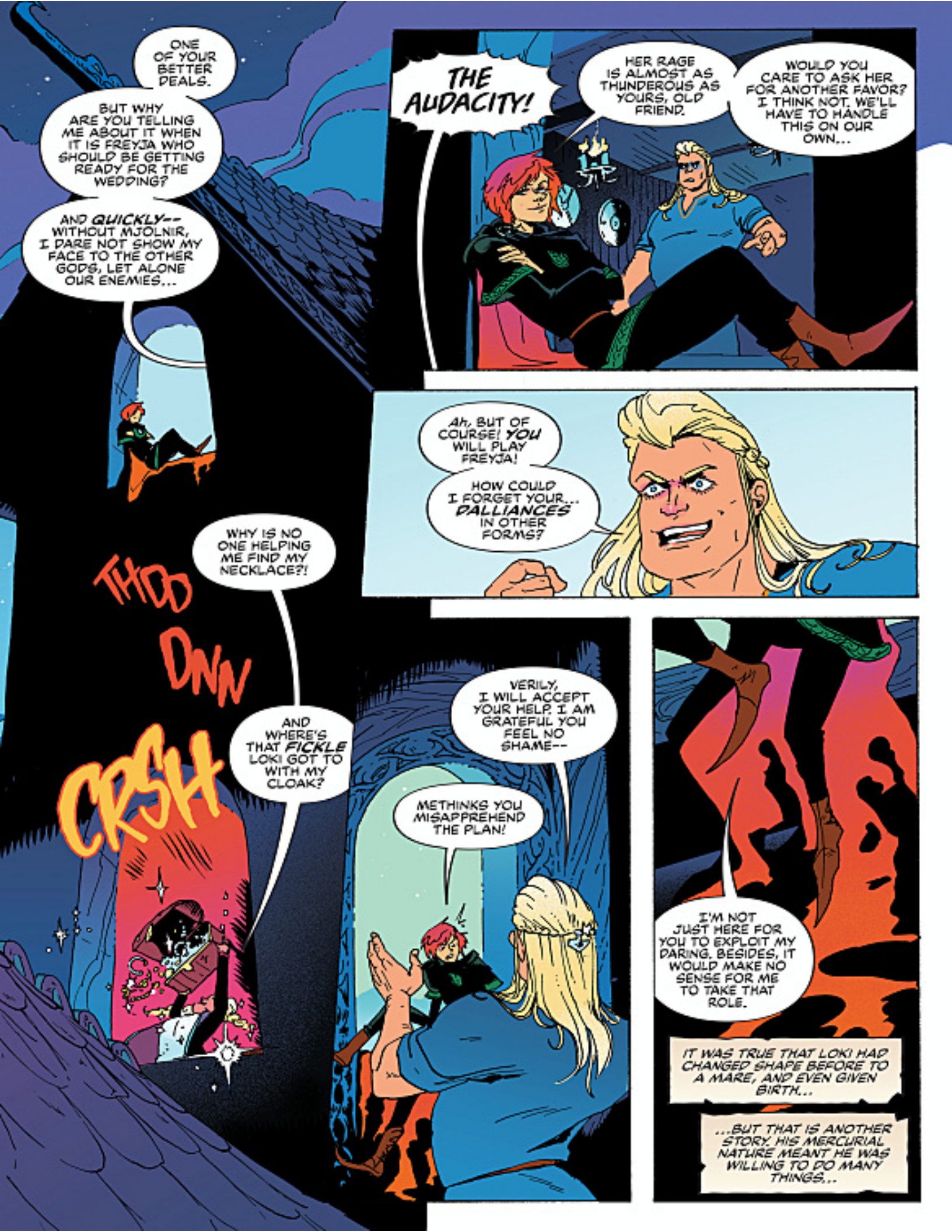

...AND THOR HAS NO IDEA WHERE HIS HAMMER IS!
OH, YOU DO KNOW HOW TO BRIGHTEN MY DAY!
BRIGHTEN *YOUR* DAY, FREYJA? BUT YOU, WITH YOUR BEAUTY AND CHARM, BRIGHTEN ALL OF OURS!
I DO NOT TRUST YOUR FLATTERY, LOKI...
...IT ALWAYS COMES WITH A *PRICE.*
METHINKS YOU KNOW ME TOO WELL...
I DID NOT COME TO YOUR CHAMBERS JUST TO TELL YOU THOR'S SECRETS.
WELL, HURRY UP AND TELL ME WHAT YOU WANT...
...SO I CAN GO BACK TO LOOKING FOR MY NECKLACE, THE PRECIOUS *BRISINGAMEN!*
OH, I'M SURE IT WILL TURN UP.
BUT IF YOU'D LIKE, I CAN LOOK FOR IT ALONGSIDE MJOLNIR...
...IF YOU'D BE SO KIND AS TO LEND ME THE *FALCON CLOAK* TO AID MY TRAVELS.
THE CLOAK WAS A HARD-WON TREASURE FREYJA WAS LOATH TO LEND. BUT SO DEARLY DID SHE MISS HER OTHER TREASURE, THE NECKLACE BRISINGAMEN, THAT SHE ACQUIESCED TO LOKI'S REQUEST.
BESIDES, SHE WAS DYING TO PASS THE NEW GOSSIP TO HER BROTHER, **FREYR**...

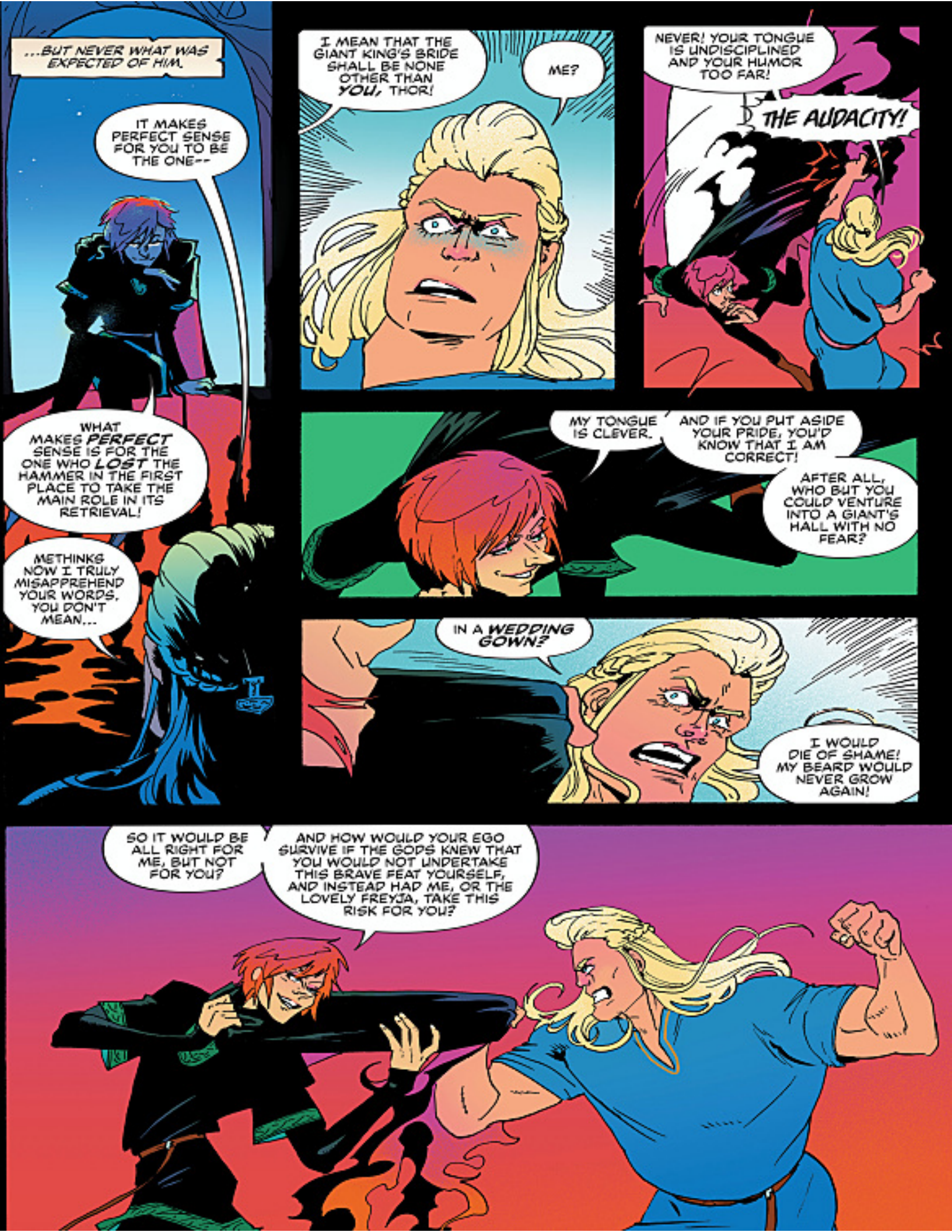

...AND FREYR TOLD TYR...
...WHO TOLD BLIND HOD...
...WHO TOLD FORSETI...
NOW, WHERE IN THE NINE WORLDS COULD HE HAVE BEEN LAST NIGHT?
NO HALL IN MIDGARD COULD MEET THOR'S THIRST FOR MEAD.
ALFHEIM?
NO, THEY'RE NOT THE PARTYING TYPES...
WITH MY LUCK, MJOLNIR WILL BE IN THE *LEAST CONVENIENT PLACE*...

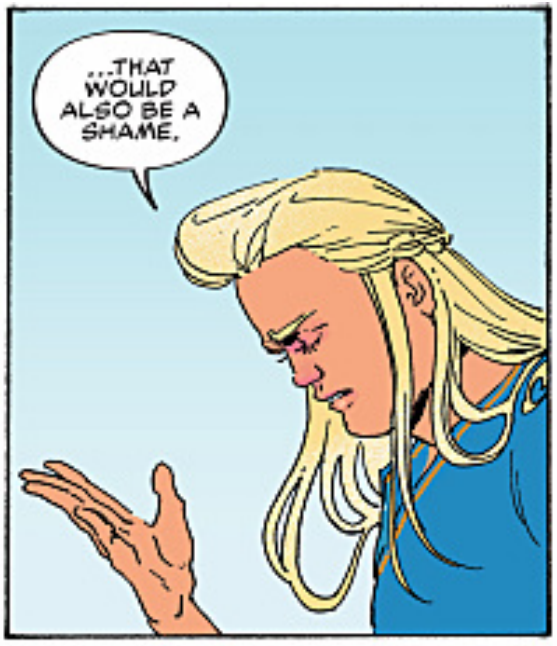
LOKI PASSED OVER THE LEAST CONVENIENT PLACE--JOTUNHEIM, THE LAND OF THE GIANTS...
A GREAT HALL?
MAYBE NOT SO GREAT...
TH'WK
HEY!
I'M NO BIRD, YOU KNOW!


LOOK LIKE A BIG BIRD TO ME.
HOLD YOUR STONES!
I'M LOKI LAUFEYSON, SWORN BROTHER OF ODIN!
SO?
I AM THRYM.
KING OF THE GIANTS!
KING?
...NEVER HEARD OF YOU.
SOUNDS IMPORTANT! MAYBE HE COULD HELP.
WELL, THE GIANTS WERE THE GODS' BITTER ENEMIES.
THOUGH LOKI HAD MORE DEALINGS WITH THEM THAN MOST, SO PERHAPS HE WAS A BIT GLIB...
NOW YOU HAVE!
BEHOLD!
I HAVE THE MIGHTY HAMMER OF THE AESIR BULLY, THOR!


IT WAS ABANDONED IN THE DEBRIS OF AN UNSEEMLY FRACAS IN OUR REALM LAST NIGHT.
AND I HAVE USED IT TO CONSTRUCT THIS KINGLY HALL!
AND... KINGLY IT IS! YOU HAVE INDEED DISTINGUISHED YOURSELF AMONG THE GIANTS, THRYM!
SO YOU SAY, LOKI, OUTCAST OF THE GODS.
BUT I KNOW MORE OF YOU THAN YOU DO OF ME. YOUR FLATTERY ALWAYS HAS A PRICE.
AH. MY REPUTATION PRECEDES ME YET AGAIN.
THEN YOU ALSO KNOW I HAVE POWERFUL FRIENDS IN THE AESIR.
AND THEY WILL NOT STAND FOR THE HAMMER BEING IN GIANT HANDS FOR LONG.
NOW YOU THREATEN ME!
BUT WITH THIS HAMMER, GIANTS' HANDS HAVE LITTLE TO FEAR FROM THE AESIR.
NO, THERE IS ONLY ONE WAY I WOULD PART WITH IT!
ONE EXCHANGE THAT COULD BE WORTHY!
THUD
IT IS I, LOKI, WHO PROCURED THE HAMMER IN THE FIRST PLACE.
WHAT, PRAY TELL, COULD I DO TO INDUCE YOU TO RETURN IT TO ME?
YOU'LL ONLY GIVE IT BACK TO THAT BRUTE, THOR. I WILL NOT RETURN IT TO YOU. BUT I WOULD GIVE IT TO FREYJA, MOST BEAUTIFUL OF THE GODDESSES...
...AS A WEDDING PRESENT.
AND SINCE SHE WOULD NEVER GIVE ME HER HAND...
OH, SHE WILL!
MAKE HASTE TO READY YOUR HALL FOR THE GRANDEST WEDDING IN THE NINE WORLDS, BECAUSE YOU WILL SOON BE A BRIDE-GROOM!

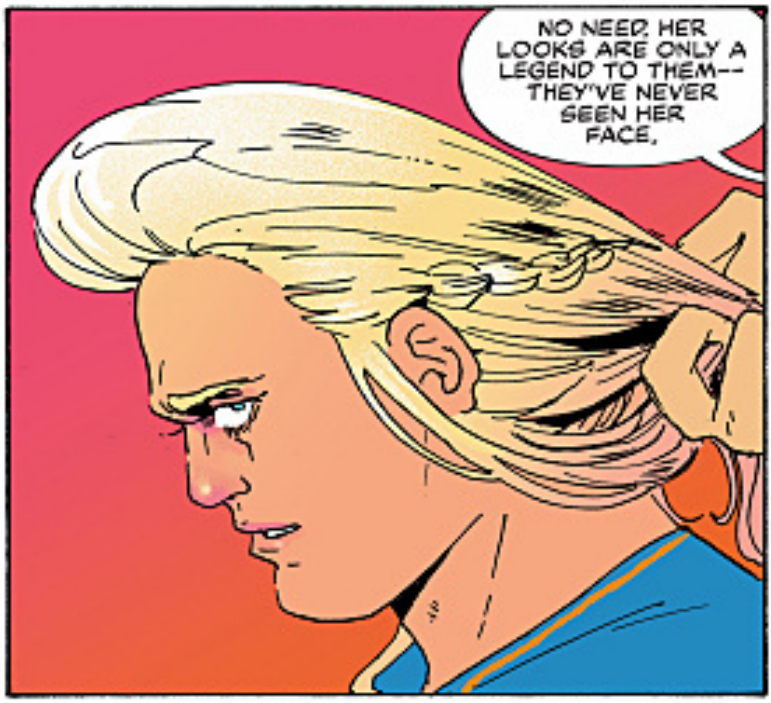

ONE OF YOUR BETTER DEALS.
BUT WHY ARE YOU TELLING ME ABOUT IT WHEN IT IS FREYJA WHO SHOULD BE GETTING READY FOR THE WEDDING?
AND QUICKLY-- WITHOUT MJOLNIR, I DARE NOT SHOW MY FACE TO THE OTHER GODS, LET ALONE OUR ENEMIES...
THE AUDACITY!
HER RAGE IS ALMOST AS THUNDEROUS AS YOURS, OLD FRIEND.
WOULD YOU CARE TO ASK HER FOR ANOTHER FAVOR? I THINK NOT. WE'LL HAVE TO HANDLE THIS ON OUR OWN...
Ah, BUT OF COURSE! YOU WILL PLAY FREYJA!
HOW COULD I FORGET YOUR... DALLIANCES IN OTHER FORMS?
WHY IS NO ONE HELPING ME FIND MY NECKLACE?!
THUD DNN
CRSH
AND WHERE'S THAT FICKLE LOKI GOT TO WITH MY CLOAK?
METHINKS YOU MISAPPREHEND THE PLAN!
VERILY, I WILL ACCEPT YOUR HELP. I AM GRATEFUL YOU FEEL NO SHAME--
I'M NOT JUST HERE FOR YOU TO EXPLOIT MY DARING. BESIDES, IT WOULD MAKE NO SENSE FOR ME TO TAKE THAT ROLE.
IT WAS TRUE THAT LOKI HAD CHANGED SHAPE BEFORE TO A MARE, AND EVEN GIVEN BIRTH...
...BUT THAT IS ANOTHER STORY. HIS MERCURIAL NATURE MEANT HE WAS WILLING TO DO MANY THINGS...


...BUT NEVER WHAT WAS EXPECTED OF HIM.
IT MAKES PERFECT SENSE FOR YOU TO BE THE ONE--
I MEAN THAT THE GIANT KING'S BRIDE SHALL BE NONE OTHER THAN YOU, THOR!
ME?
NEVER! YOUR TONGUE IS UNDISCIPLINED AND YOUR HUMOR TOO FAR!
THE AUDACITY!
WHAT MAKES PERFECT SENSE IS FOR THE ONE WHO LOST THE HAMMER IN THE FIRST PLACE TO TAKE THE MAIN ROLE IN ITS RETRIEVAL!
METHINKS NOW I TRULY MISAPPREHEND YOUR WORDS. YOU DON'T MEAN...
MY TONGUE IS CLEVER.
AND IF YOU PUT ASIDE YOUR PRIDE, YOU'D KNOW THAT I AM CORRECT!
AFTER ALL, WHO BUT YOU COULD VENTURE INTO A GIANT'S HALL WITH NO FEAR?
IN A WEDDING GOWN?
I WOULD DIE OF SHAME! MY BEARD WOULD NEVER GROW AGAIN!
SO IT WOULD BE ALL RIGHT FOR ME, BUT NOT FOR YOU?
AND HOW WOULD YOUR EGO SURVIVE IF THE GODS KNEW THAT YOU WOULD NOT UNDERTAKE THIS BRAVE FEAT YOURSELF, AND INSTEAD HAD ME, OR THE LOVELY FREYJA, TAKE THIS RISK FOR YOU?

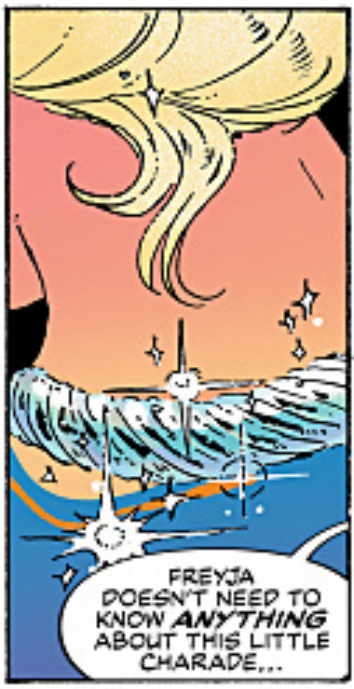

...THAT WOULD ALSO BE A SHAME.

THE BIGGEST SHAME OF ALL IS THAT YOU SEEM TO LACK CONFIDENCE IN YOUR VISAGE.
YES, YES, FREYJA IS THE MOST BEAUTIFUL OF THE GODDESSES--

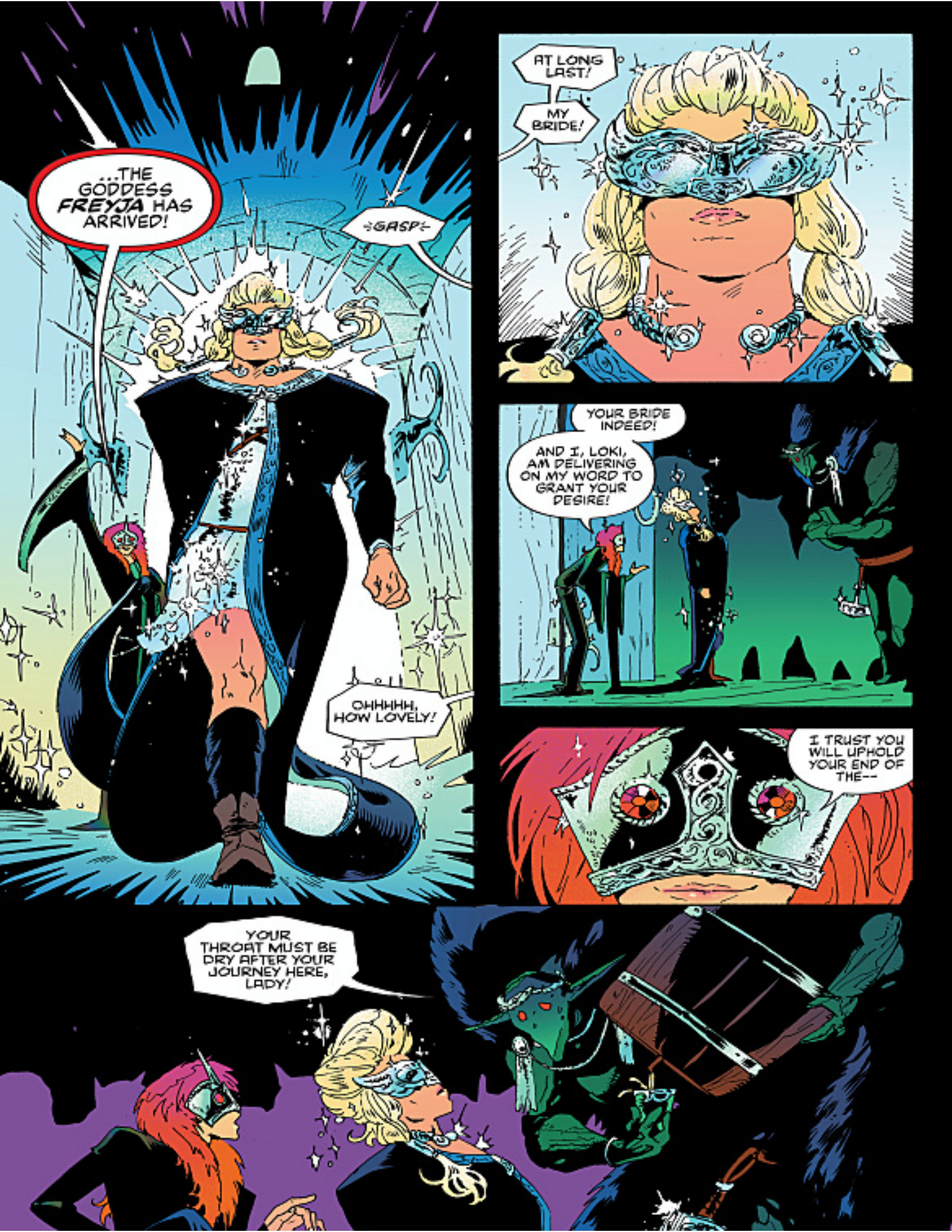
--BUT YOU ARE A PRIME SPECIMEN OF AESIR YOURSELF!
YOUR FEATURES HAVE A SIMILAR LUSTER--
SIMILAR LUSTER... hm.
BUT NOT THE SAME, AND I DO NOT POSSESS YOUR POWERS OF TRANSFORMATION.


NO NEED. HER LOOKS ARE ONLY A LEGEND TO THEM-- THEY'VE NEVER SEEN HER FACE.

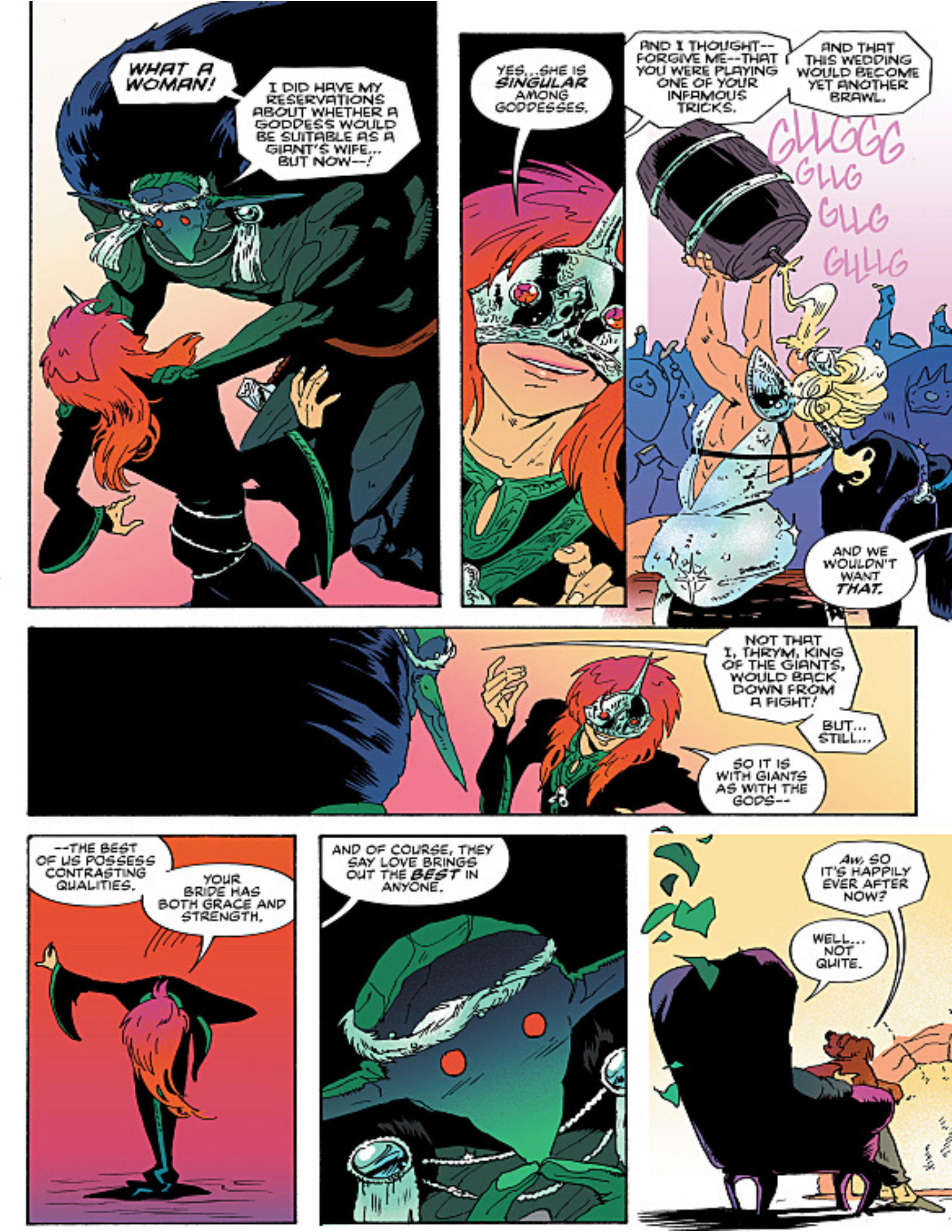
AND IF WE TOP YOUR BRIDAL TROUSSEAU WITH MY SECRET WEAPON...

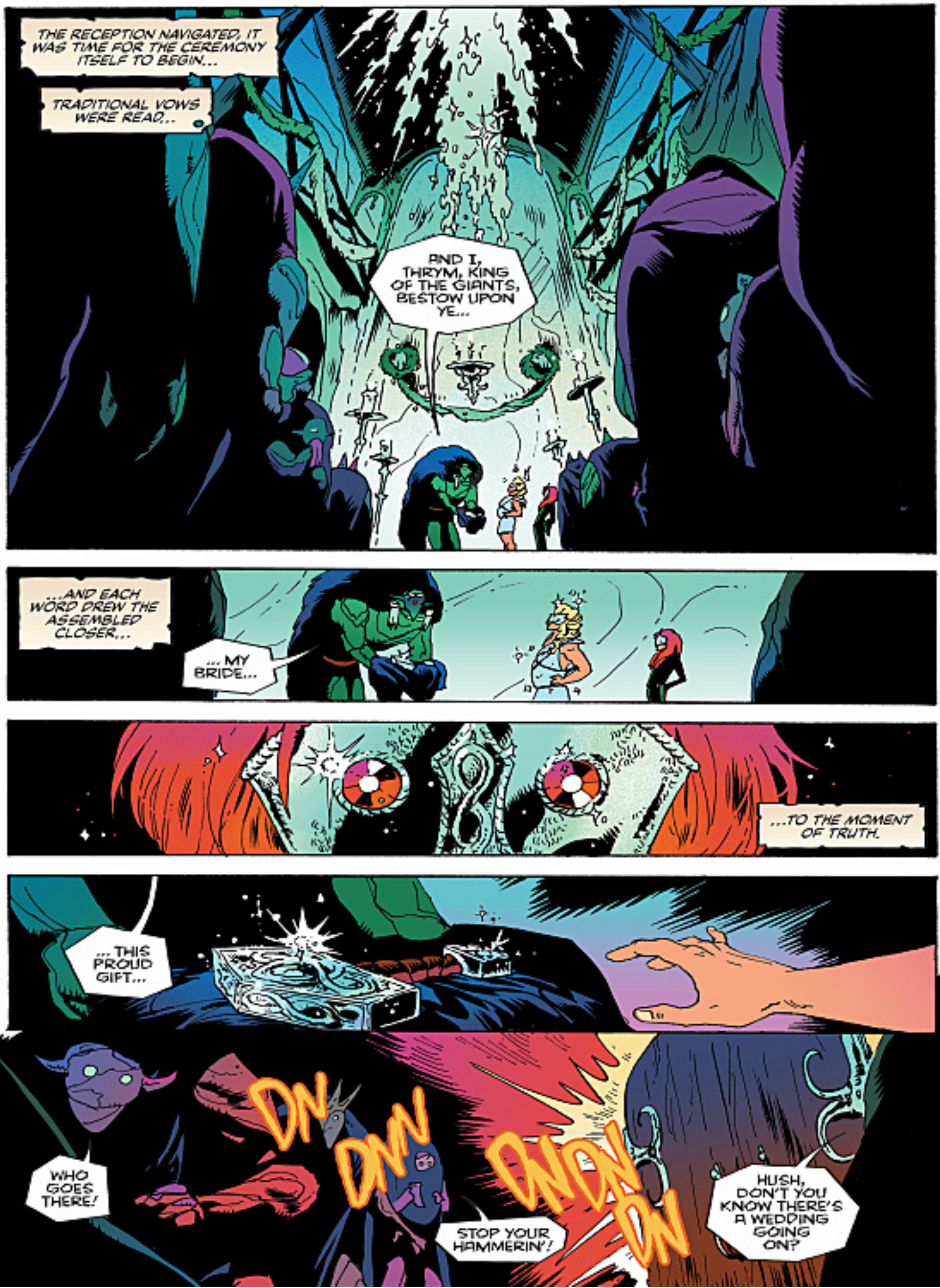

FREYJA DOESN'T NEED TO KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT THIS LITTLE CHARADE...

THRYM DOES LOOK VERY KINGLY TODAY.
I FEAR THAT LOKI IS MAKING A FOOL OF HIM.
WHERE IS THIS LEGENDARY BEAUTY? AND HER AESIR GUESTS?
I ALWAYS CRY AT WEDDINGS!
LO!
THE LEGENDARY BEAUTY OF THE VANIR...
...THE JEWEL OF ASGARD...


...THE GODDESS FREYJA HAS ARRIVED!
GASP
OHHHHH, HOW LOVELY!
AT LONG LAST!
MY BRIDE!
YOUR BRIDE INDEED!
AND I, LOKI, AM DELIVERING ON MY WORD TO GRANT YOUR DESIRE!
I TRUST YOU WILL UPHOLD YOUR END OF THE--
YOUR THROAT MUST BE DRY AFTER YOUR JOURNEY HERE, LADY!

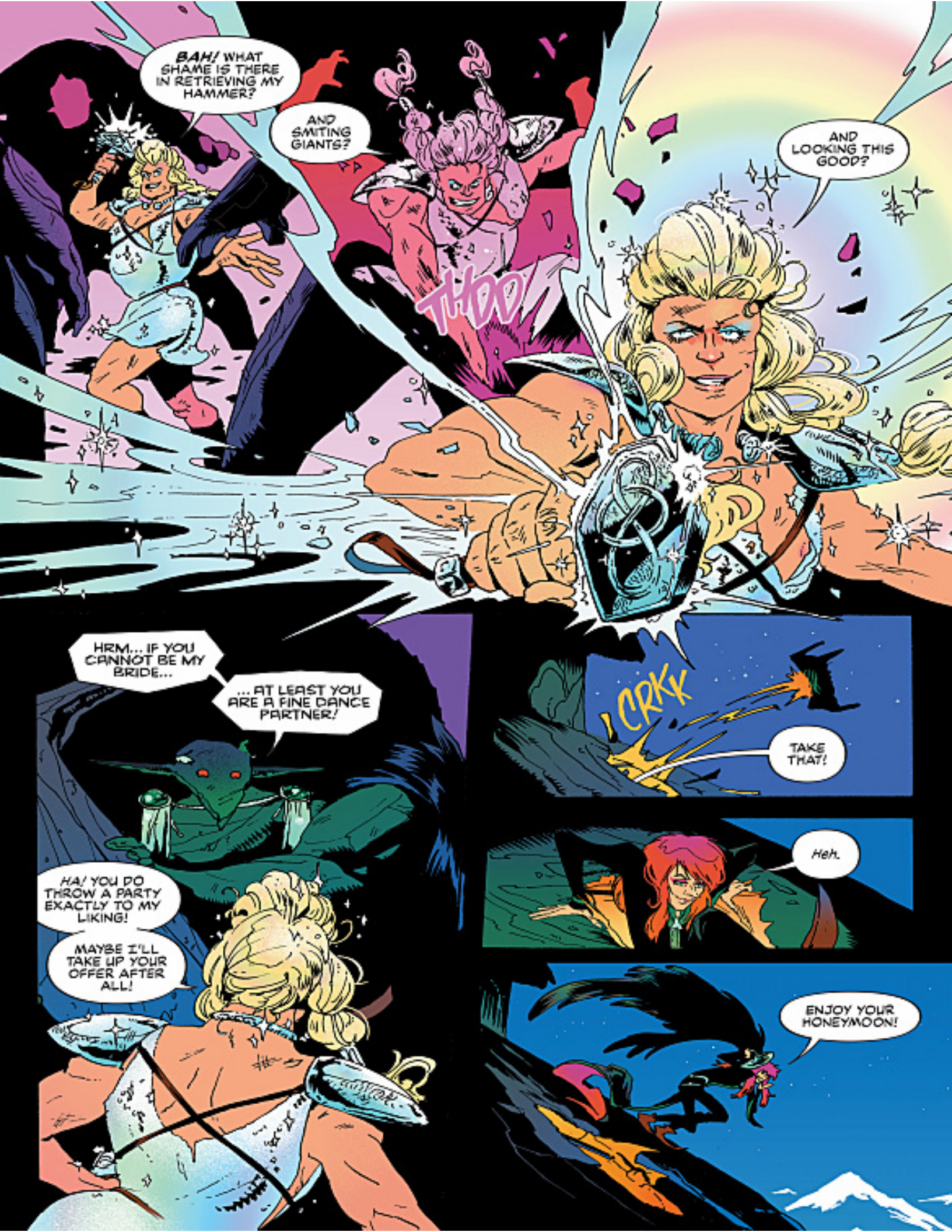
PARCHED!
ER--MY LADY HERE HAS BEEN SO EXCITED FOR THE WEDDING, SHE COULDN'T DRINK A DROP!
WH-WHAT A THIRST!
THEN, PERHAPS HAVE A BITE TO SUP AS WELL?
FAMISHED!
...NOR HAS SHE HAD A MORSEL OF FOOD!
D-DID OUR FEAST DISAGREE WITH YOUR, HRM...
... DELICATE CONSTITUTION?
UUURPP
...EXCUSE ME.
MY LORD...
MY LADY IS--


WHAT A WOMAN!
I DID HAVE MY RESERVATIONS ABOUT WHETHER A GODDESS WOULD BE SUITABLE AS A GIANT'S WIFE... BUT NOW--!
YES...SHE IS SINGULAR AMONG GODDESSES.
AND I THOUGHT-- FORGIVE ME--THAT YOU WERE PLAYING ONE OF YOUR INFAMOUS TRICKS.
AND THAT THIS WEDDING WOULD BECOME YET ANOTHER BRAWL.
GLLGGG GLLG GLLG GLLLG
AND WE WOULDN'T WANT THAT.
NOT THAT I, THRYM, KING OF THE GIANTS, WOULD BACK DOWN FROM A FIGHT!
BUT... STILL...
SO IT IS WITH GIANTS AS WITH THE GODS--
--THE BEST OF US POSSESS CONTRASTING QUALITIES.
YOUR BRIDE HAS BOTH GRACE AND STRENGTH.
AND OF COURSE, THEY SAY LOVE BRINGS OUT THE BEST IN ANYONE.
Aw, SO IT'S HAPPILY EVER AFTER NOW?
WELL... NOT QUITE.

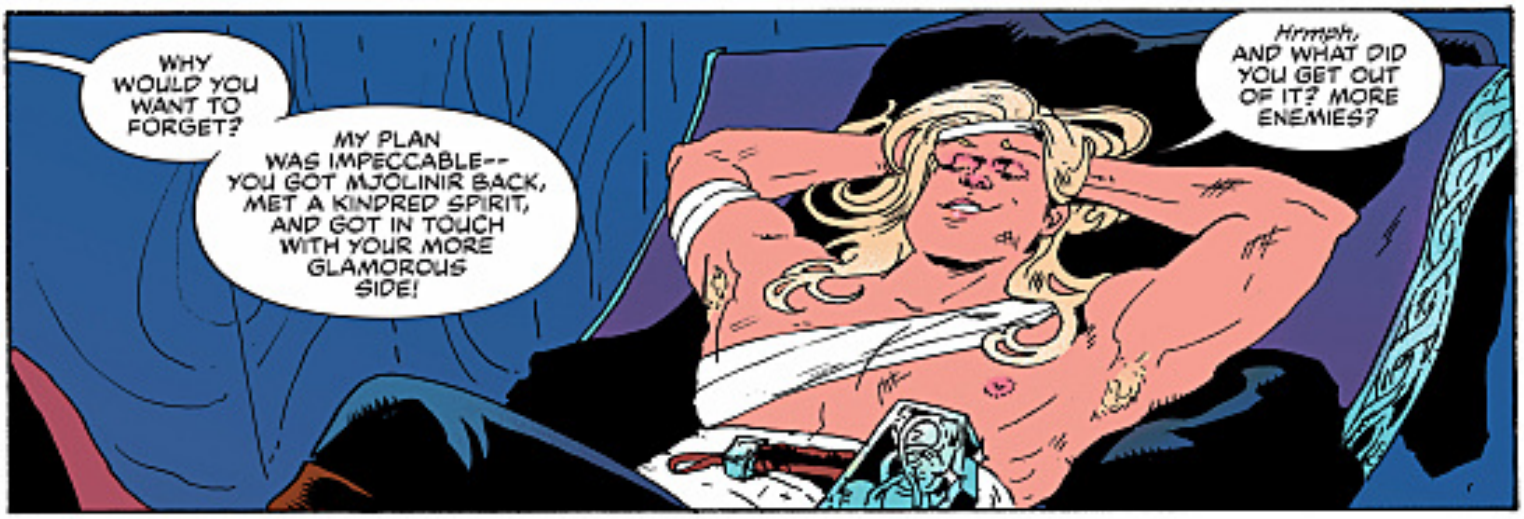

THE RECEPTION NAVIGATED, IT WAS TIME FOR THE CEREMONY ITSELF TO BEGIN...
TRADITIONAL VOWS WERE READ...
AND I, THRYM, KING OF THE GIANTS, BESTOW UPON YE...
...AND EACH WORD DREW THE ASSEMBLED CLOSER...
... MY BRIDE...
...TO THE MOMENT OF TRUTH.
... THIS PROUD GIFT...
WHO GOES THERE!
DN
DNN
DNDN
DN
STOP YOUR HAMMERIN'!
HUSH, DON'T YOU KNOW THERE'S A WEDDING GOING ON?

WHAT IN THE NINE WORLDS--!
WE'RE HERE TO SEE OUR DEAR THOR!
WE HEARD HE'D SUFFERED A TERRIBLE LOSS--
A WEDDING? YOU FORGOT TO INVITE US, SO WE INVITED OURSELVES!
IT IS A TRICK, MY WOULD-BE-BRIDEGROOM!
I AM NOT FREYJA, BUT THOR!
THANK YOU FOR KEEPING MY HAMMER WARM...
...IT IS READY FOR ME TO SWING!
HEY... HE DOESN'T LOOK A THING LIKE ME!
THWK
WAIT--
CRRK
THOR, WHAT ARE YOU DOING WITH MY NECKLACE?

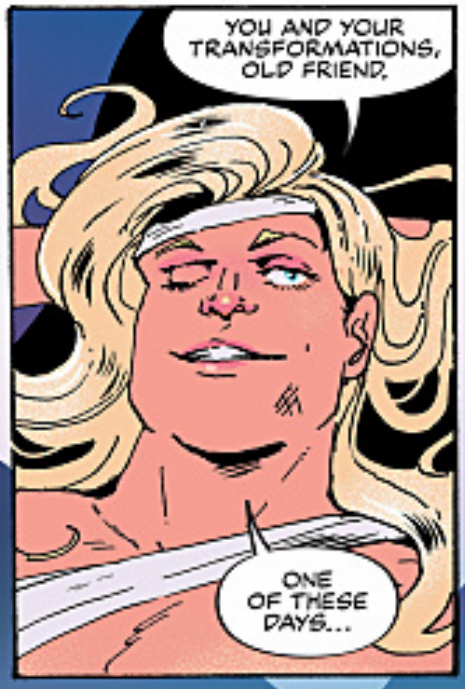
WHERE IS THAT SCOUNDREL? HE HAS BETRAYED ME!
ALAS, I SHOULD HAVE KNOWN NO GODDESS SO PERFECT COULD TRULY EXIST!
CRKKOOM
WHAT ABOUT THAT CRUDE IMPOSTER IS PERFECT?
THE AUDACITY!
W-WHICH ONE IS-- URK!
HONESTLY, I THOUGHT I WAS SEEING DOUBLE, TOO!
COULD I REALLY HAVE TWO SISTERS?
NOW, NOW, SURELY WE CAN ALL AGREE TO FIGHT THE GIANTS, NOT EACH OTHER...
I SAID I'D GRANT YOUR DESIRE, THRYM-- BUT I DIDN'T SAY WHICH ONE!
THE LOVE OF FIGHTING RUNS IN THE BLOOD OF BOTH GIANTS AND GODS ALIKE.
THOR, HAVE YOU NO SHAME?

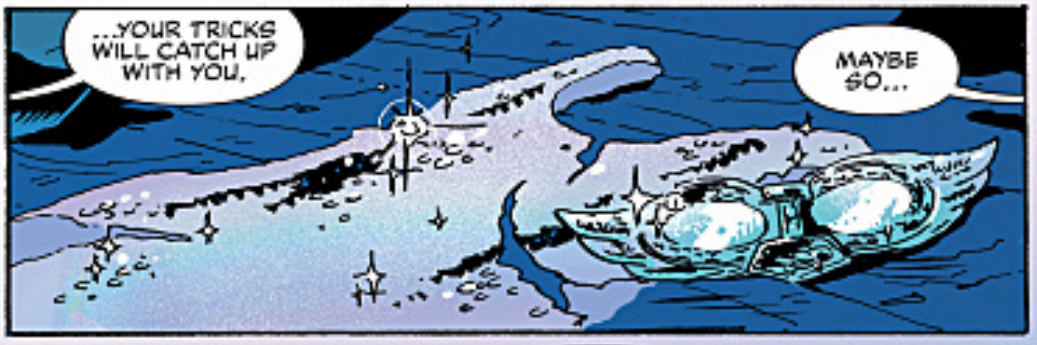

BAH! WHAT SHAME IS THERE IN RETRIEVING MY HAMMER?
AND SMITING GIANTS?
THDD
AND LOOKING THIS GOOD?
HRM... IF YOU CANNOT BE MY BRIDE...
... AT LEAST YOU ARE A FINE DANCE PARTNER!
CRKK
TAKE THAT!
HA! YOU DO THROW A PARTY EXACTLY TO MY LIKING!
MAYBE I'LL TAKE UP YOUR OFFER AFTER ALL!
Heh.
ENJOY YOUR HONEYMOON!

Ah, WHAT A NIGHT!
WILL YOU REMEMBER *THIS* ONE?
HOW COULD I FORGET SUCH AN ESCAPADE!

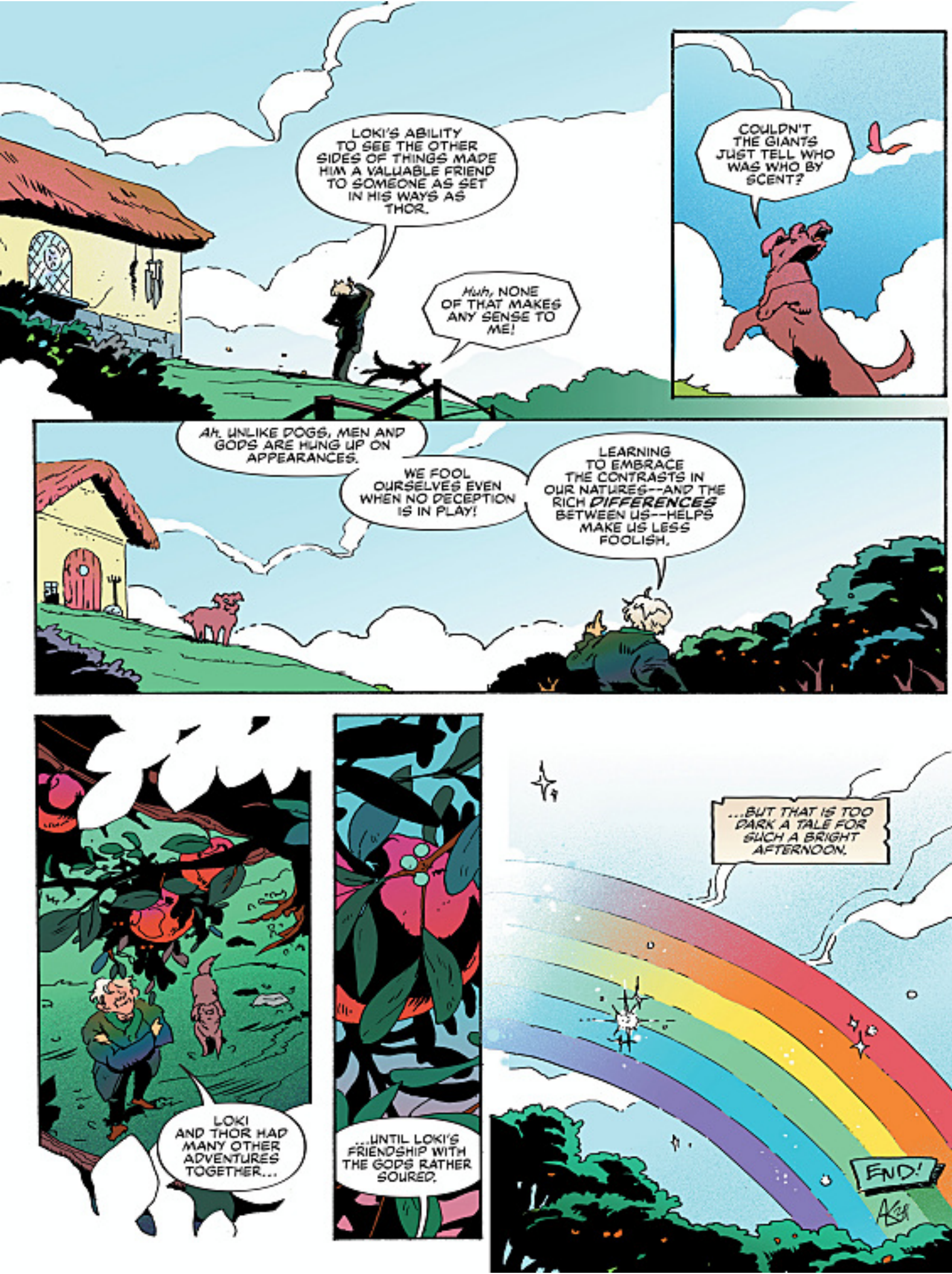

WHY WOULD YOU WANT TO FORGET?
MY PLAN WAS IMPECCABLE-- YOU GOT MJOLINIR BACK, MET A KINDRED SPIRIT, AND GOT IN TOUCH WITH YOUR MORE GLAMOROUS SIDE!
Hrmph, AND WHAT DID YOU GET OUT OF IT? MORE ENEMIES?

AT LEAST MY NEW ENEMIES WILL BE EASIER TO ESCAPE, SINCE I TRADED A PILFERED NECKLACE FOR THIS MOST *EXPEDITIOUS* MEANS OF TRANSPORT!


YOU AND YOUR TRANSFORMATIONS, OLD FRIEND.
ONE OF THESE DAYS...


...YOUR TRICKS WILL CATCH UP WITH YOU.
MAYBE SO...

...BUT UNTIL THEN, I'LL DO WHAT I PLEASE!


LOKI'S ABILITY TO SEE THE OTHER SIDES OF THINGS MADE HIM A VALUABLE FRIEND TO SOMEONE AS SET IN HIS WAYS AS THOR.
Huh. NONE OF THAT MAKES ANY SENSE TO ME!
COULDN'T THE GIANTS JUST TELL WHO WAS WHO BY SCENT?
AH. UNLIKE DOGS, MEN AND GODS ARE HUNG UP ON APPEARANCES.
WE FOOL OURSELVES EVEN WHEN NO DECEPTION IS IN PLAY!
LEARNING TO EMBRACE THE CONTRASTS IN OUR NATURES--AND THE RICH DIFFERENCES BETWEEN US--HELPS MAKE US LESS FOOLISH.
LOKI AND THOR HAD MANY OTHER ADVENTURES TOGETHER...
...UNTIL LOKI'S FRIENDSHIP WITH THE GODS RATHER SOURED.
...BUT THAT IS TOO DARK A TALE FOR SUCH A BRIGHT AFTERNOON.
END!

THE MAKING OF

Jim Henson's™ THE STORYTELLER™

Tricksters

A BEHIND-THE-SCENES LOOK AT THE ART AND CRAFT OF THE STORYTELLERS AND THEIR TALES.

With Art and Commentary by

Jade Zhang

Erin Kubo

Isa Hanssen

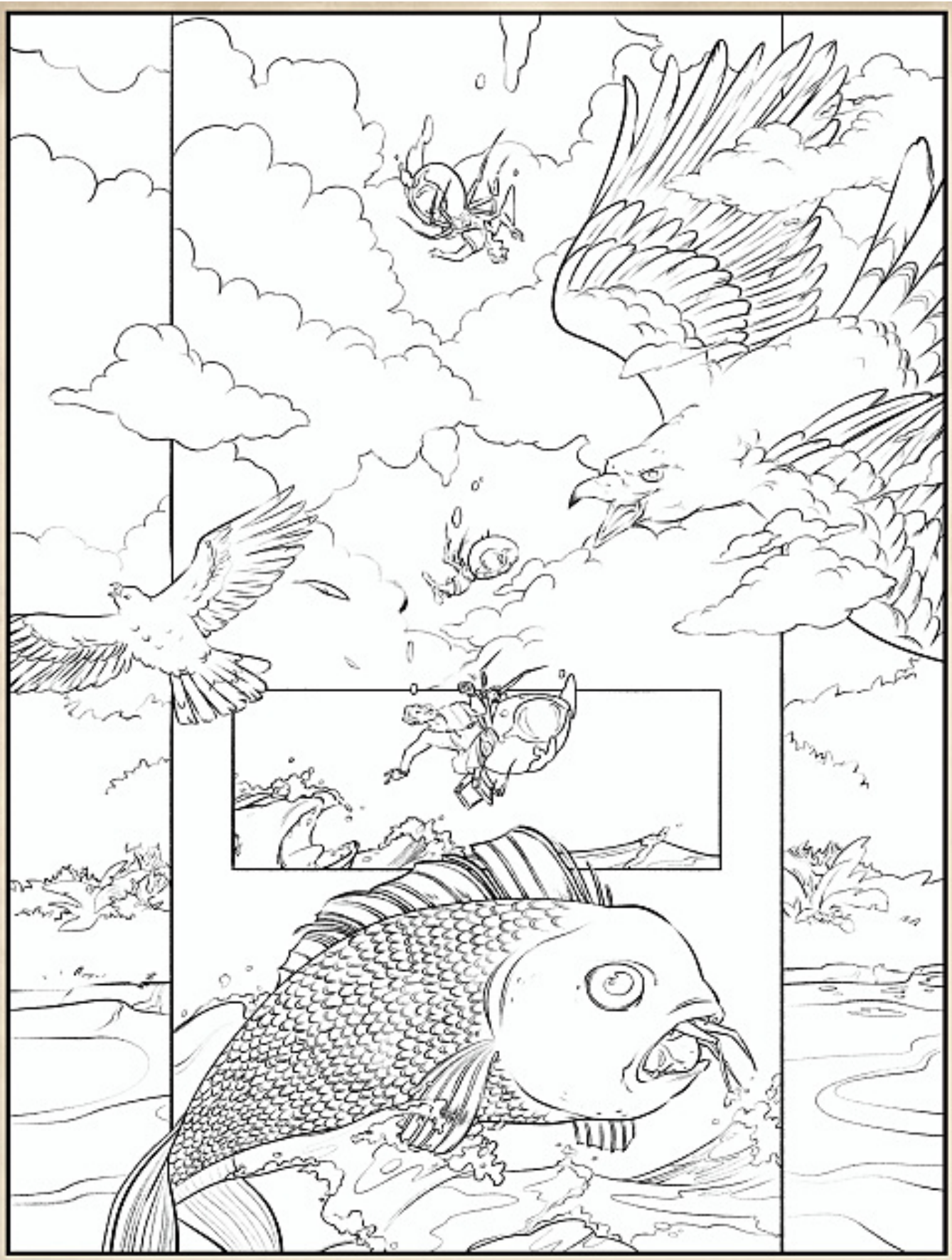
A.L. Kaplan

Tale One Art by Jade Zhang

Jade Zhang Commentary: When I got the brief for the story, I was really hoping I'd get to draw a lot of tiny details and beautiful treasures, and this page really delivered. I wanted this page to be decadent and magical, from the treasures in Nyame's hand to the cloud shapes around Anansi. I also really wanted to show the absolute rollercoaster of emotions Anansi goes through in trying to get the jar of stories from his father.

Tale One Art by Jade Zhang

JZ: Honestly, I went a little hogwild drawing this page. The only reason inking this wasn't a convoluted mess of layers was because I was working on the iPad, and the horrible beast only let me have three. That being said, I thoroughly enjoyed drawing Anansi commune with the fifth dimension.



Tale One Art by Jade Zhang

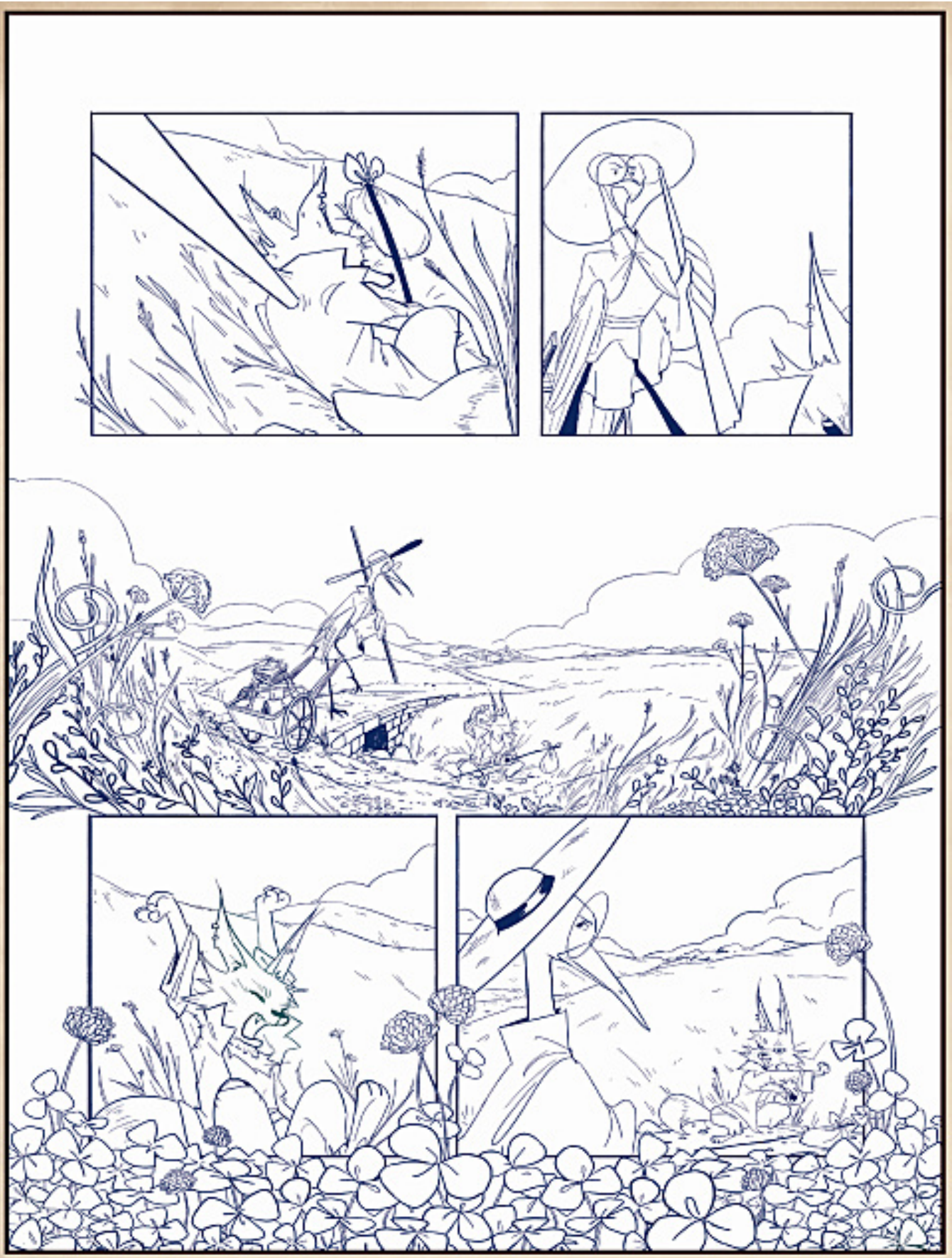
JZ: I really struggled with the spacing on this page. I wanted the scene of Anansi falling to look longer and have the reader slowly fall down with him. Once I added the side panels to make the middle really thin and tall, things started coming together. My personal favorite part is the inset panel with the fish's mouth just popping out of the water, ready to lunge out and swallow Anansi.

Tale Two Art by Erin Kubo

Erin Kubo Commentary: One of the first things that drew me to Jordan's script was the emphasis on dyeing and textiles. Portraying the beautiful adire cloth created by Lolla and her grandmother was an exciting challenge. I used a wet-on-wet technique by creating a wash, letting it dry slightly, and then painting designs on top of the damp wash. The effect was often unpredictable, but I felt the haphazard blooms of ink played nicely off of Eshu's flowing cloak and twists. This page came out particularly well, and I love any opportunity to do a dramatic full-page panel.

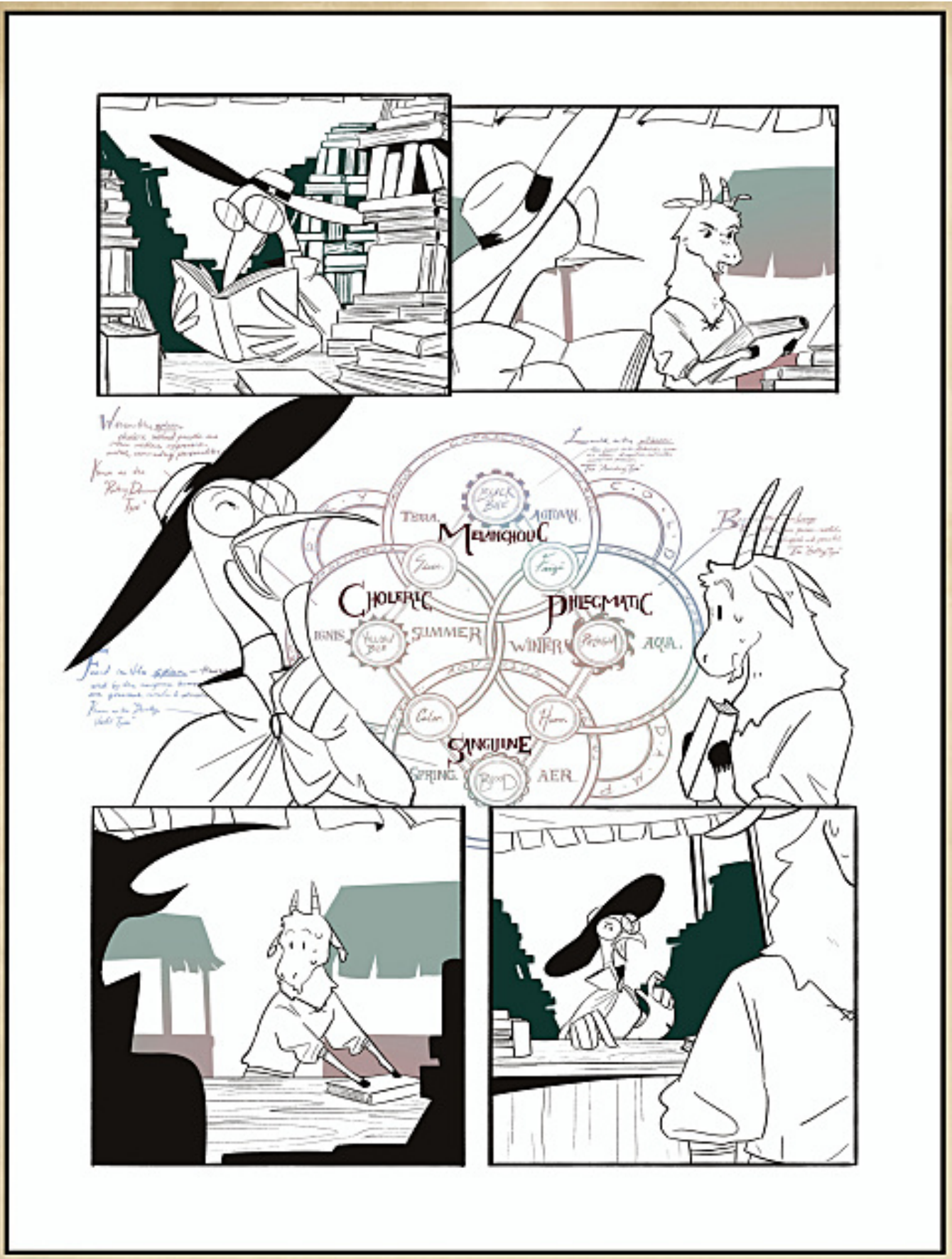
Tale Two Art by Erin Kubo

EK: This was my favorite page to thumbnail because we get to see some interaction between the moody, jealous Eshu and the enthusiastic, clueless Tunde. One of the more interesting visual aspects of Eshu is his ability to change size dramatically, and I chose to change his size between panels to create a chaotic and disorienting effect. Drawing an idealized "Tunde-vision" portrait of Lolla was fun, too.



Tale Three Art by Isa Hanssen

Isa Hanssen Commentary: Introducing the trickster fox himself! Here I establish a couple of things. Firstly, the dynamic between Stork and Reynard—Stork is framed against a clean blue sky, literally looking down on Reynard. Secondly, an association between Reynard and "the wilds" of nature. On this page, Reynard's influence is a comfort—it's clover and yarrow and dandelions cradling the panels. Later, this manifests as malicious vines framing Reynard's more deceitful actions, and thorns spilling over panel borders in a threatening manner.



Tale Three Art by Isa Hanssen

IH: I had a blast researching humorism and adding a lot of hidden details. You can see my practically unreadable note-taking in the margins around a chart documenting the connections between the humors and the natural world—everything from the four seasons, the four elements, astrology, personality types, temperature, symbolic fauna, etc. (For the record: I believe Reynard to be primarily Sanguine with some Choleric influence, while Stork appears primarily Melancholic with some Phlegmatic influence. They really are foils in every sense.)

Tale Four Art by A.L. Kaplan

A.L. Kaplan Commentary: Robin and I discussed the approach for this story beat early on, and she left the script really open for me. I'd been wanting to try my hand at a spread with multiple shots of the same character in sequence. It feels like a fun callback to the cosmic fantasy comics of the '70s and '80s that we both love.

Tale Four Art by A.L. Kaplan

Robin Kaplan: He veered off my script here, splitting one page into two, and I love it!
ALK: We'd never collaborated on comics before, despite both making our own. I rarely use color in mine, so this page is emblematic to me of both my process to make the color pull its weight in the visual storytelling, and our process of working together to craft this story.

TALES ONE, THREE, AND FOUR COVERS BY

PEACH MOMOKO

the STORYTELLERS

Jonathan Rivera is a writer and illustrator who grew up in New Jersey and currently lives in Los Angeles, California. Before this, he was the writer of the comic book series *Cave Carson Has a Cybernetic Eye* and its sequel series *Cave Carson Has an Interstellar Eye*. His goal is to keep working on more beautiful and creative comic books that have at least five words in the title.

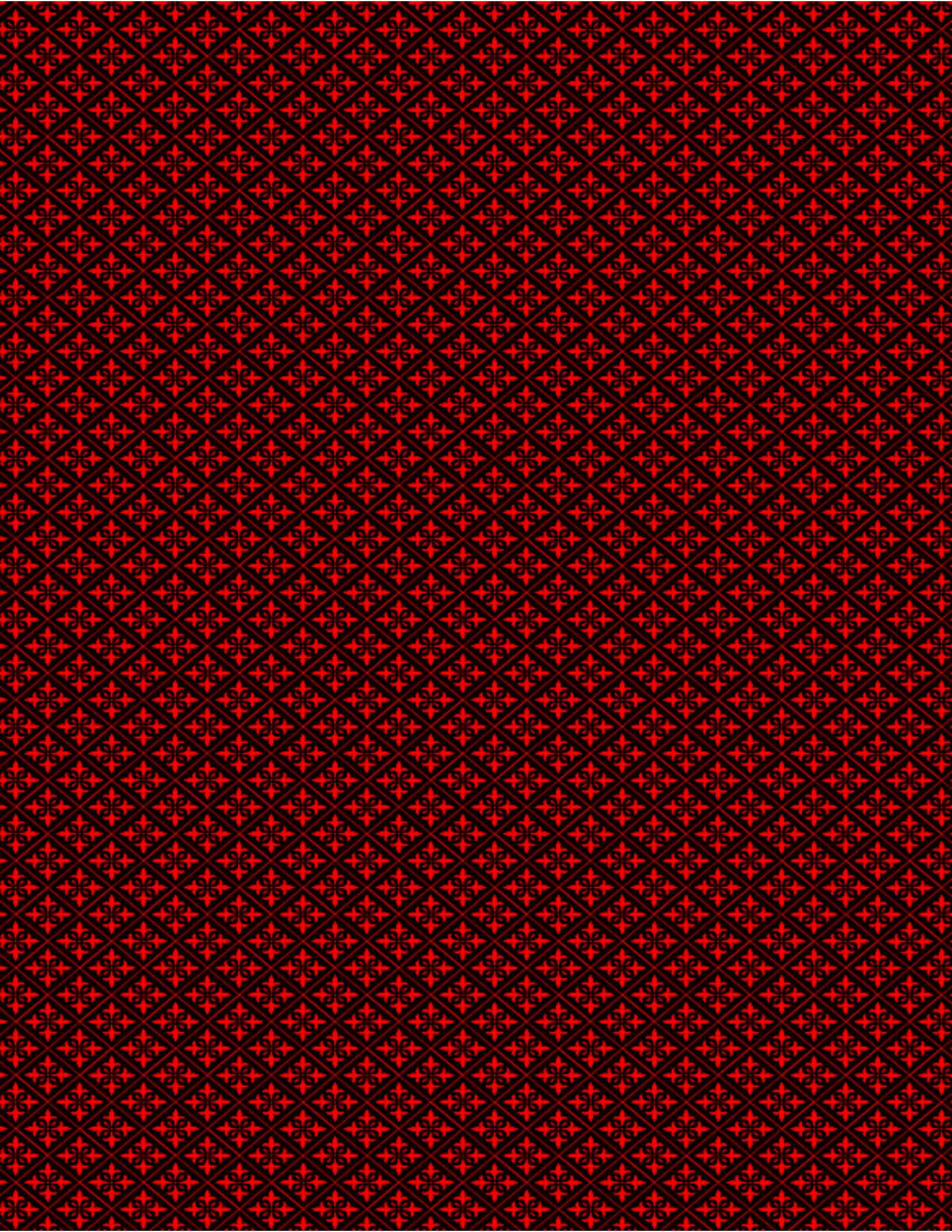
Jade Zhang is a Chinese-Canadian comic artist based in Toronto. She graduated from OCAD University during the 2020 plague. Jade is passionate about telling stories exploring identity, sexuality, and the occasional eldritch horror. Jade can be found wandering local zine fairs (post-pandemic, of course), and petting stray cats (always).

Jordan Ifueko is the *New York Times* bestselling author of the *Raybearer* series and other stories. She writes about magic Black girls who aren't magic all the time, because honestly, they deserve a vacation. Ifueko lives in Los Angeles with her husband David and their three-legged trustafarian dog Reginald Ovahcomah.

Erin Kubo is an illustrator and comic artist living in Seattle. She grew up somewhere between a forest and a corn field in New Jersey before heading to Maryland Institute College of Art to earn her B.F.A. in Illustration. The content of her work varies between wistful women, dark horrors, and funny little creatures.

Amal El-Mohtar has long loved folklore and fairy tales from all over the world, and writes them into her fiction, poetry, and criticism whenever she can. She is the science fiction and fantasy columnist for the *New York Times Book Review* and the co-author, with Max Gladstone, of *This Is How You Lose the Time War*, a novella which has received several honors including the Hugo, Nebula, BSFA, and Locus Awards. She lives in Ottawa, Canada, with her spouse and two cats. You can find her online at **amalelmohtar.com**.

Isa Hanssen is a Filipino Mexican-American narrative artist and occasional filmmaker with a love for folklore and mundane weirdness. She's lived all over the place, but spent the most time in a very haunted town in Maryland before moving out west to attend CalArts in Los Angeles, California, where she currently resides. She likes to tell stories at the intersection of the personally existential and the mythological.

Robin Kaplan and her partner make a fantasy comic for adults called *Ushala at World's End*, and as Robin Robinson she is the author-illustrator of the all-ages graphic novel *No One Returns from the Enchanted Forest*. She is clearly a believer in long titles for any age, and lives in a house that looks like someone threw a Halloween party in a library and forgot to clean up afterwards.

A.L. Kaplan is a cartoonist in the Wild West. He made the gay sci-fi webcomic *Full-Spectrum Therapy*, and likes adventuring by bike and blasting doom metal to his cats, plants, and rocks. Although he's enjoyed changing his shape throughout the years, it's unclear if he's been successful in tricking anyone.